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#20

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS

inTERVIEW

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UP FRONT

ITEM! Spring is in the air already, and wait'll you see what we have in store for you in the summer months! I'm just going to hint about our Big Surprise right now — but need I remind you that our *25th issue* is right around the corner — ? I promise you this: *It's guaranteed to become an instant collectible, a vital and valuable part of every comics collection for years to come.*

-Dave B

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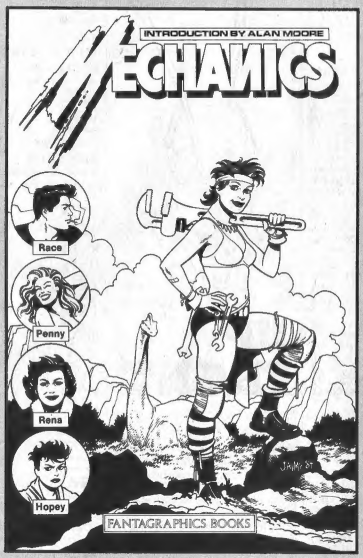

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"We eat guacamole and sit in hot tubs. It fries our brains so we can't write."

Photo: Kenneth Jones

TOM & MARY BIERBAUM

I first met Tom and Mary through a mutual friend, Arnie Starkey, at the 1983 San Diego Comic Convention. I remember that day because they were readily accepted into DC's New Talent Program, while Arnie and I talked ourselves hoarse trying to pitch a project we had created, to no avail. Time passed and I heard through the grapevine that they were involved with a new comics company, Deluxe. More time passed and I saw their maiden effort — a very outstanding revival of the Lightning character in issue #2 of WALLY WOOD'S T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. I thought it most appropriate that they were finally able to work with Keith Giffen, whose unique penciling they had admired as far back as his first days on DC's LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES.

One senses a professionalism — a will to succeed — in Tom and Mary that is unusual and sincere. I wish to thank them for doing this interview on such short notice, literally at the last minute, while Dave Kraft "held the presses" to include them in this issue . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name(s): Tom and Mary Bierbaum
Place(s) of Birth: Tom: Dover, Delaware. Mary: Long Beach, California
Credits: Wally Wood's T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS: Lightning. Designed Element Lad's uniform (Tom).
Favorite Comic Books: Tom: LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, from the past, GREEN LANTERN, Elongated Man. Mary: X-MEN, LEGION, AMERICAN FLAGG, LOVE AND ROCKETS.
Hobbies: Tom: softball, cartooning, A.P.A.s, sports. Mary: A.P.A.s, softball, aerobics.
Goals Yet To Be Accomplished: Full-time work as comics writers, and creation of our own concepts.

KEN JONES: *Did you read the original T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS in the Sixties?*
TOM BIERBAUM: No — had you, Mary?
MARY BIERBAUM: I hadn't even heard of them until Texas Comics put out their team-up of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents and the Justice Machine.
KEN: *How much background research did you have to do on Lightning before you began to write the feature?*
TOM: Well, when we first heard about the possibility of doing it, we bought four or five back issues and tried to get to know the characters — and then we were lucky enough to find all but one issue of T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS at a convention in Chicago. Essentially, we have the complete line and we've read them all.
KEN: *Did you follow any of the further incarnations? Did you see the John Carbonaro Comics versions?*
MARY: We only saw two of his books — that's all we could find.
KEN: *In your opinion, what makes Lightning different from the Flash or other superspeed stars of the past?*

"I designed a bunch of uniforms. Keith

TOM: The most obvious thing is that he is aging and that his uniform takes a toll.

MARY: His power comes from his uniform, not from within —

TOM: Not from some accident or mutation or whatever. There's also some subtle technical things, like he doesn't run on water. He doesn't do the same super-speed stunts. Every once in a while, the editors have told us, "Don't do this because he's different than the Flash. He can't do that." I think there's an effort to make it as different as we can. Keith has tried to avoid drawing Flash-like things. He's trying to show speed — not show someone running with a bunch of speed lines behind him — to show that visually Lightning's different. The primary difference is the fact that he's aging and that he's a unique and separate kind of personality.

KEN: *Having Wally Wood's name featured prominently in the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS logo is unusual. Why do you think this was done?*

TOM: Associating his name with this project is the right thing to do, because reading the original comics I can safely say he was the star of the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. I thought his stories were brilliant. Since he was really the driving force behind the original conceptions and characters, certainly it was a good decision to honor his contribution in this way. We hope that what we're doing is in the spirit of **Wally Wood.**

KEN: *Do you think that the spy-as-superhero concept will attract an older audience?*

MARY: I think it appeals to people who remember THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. and THE AVENGERS.

TOM: I guess that whole spy thing died in the Sixties and yet T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS is sort of tied into that, so maybe it's time for spies to be popular again — especially if you make your spies superheroes. It creates a lot of possibilities. One of the challenges — and they didn't do this in the original series — is to say "What would the United Nations do? You can't fight communists when a fairly high percentage of your members are communist. So who do you fight?"

Sample of Tom's art from INTERLAC, the Legion APA (Amateur Press Association).

KEN: *I am really impressed with Keith Giffen's recent evolution. He seems to have made an impressive break from his Jack Kirby inspired roots and become involved in a more sophisticated European style of cartooning.*

TOM: I think the exciting thing about Keith is that he's very conscious about not falling into a pattern, instead of figuring out what the fans like and giving it to them. He wants to grow, wants to change, wants to do something different. The minute people start to say, "Yeah, he's found a great style and we love it," I am sure he'll say, "Now it's time to try something different." Sometimes it's frustrating when he's between styles. We're big LEGION fans, and the six months between when he first tried his more-cartoony style and got it to work were a little frustrating — having to read the comics and know that it wasn't quite happening yet. But you have to admire somebody who turns his back on what would probably be a steadier way of making money and really tries to grow as an artist.

KEN: *I am interested in your division of labor — who does what in your collaboration?*

TOM: I think that we can be fairly open about the fact that, right now, I do most of the rough drafting. Sometimes Mary rough drafts, since we both have full-time jobs outside of comics and it depends on when our assignments come up. In those cases, I tend to come back and do a second rough draft, taking some of hers and re-doing it. Then typically Mary and I will go over that together and really polish it up — because there's always a lot of rough spots.

KEN: *How do you work with Keith — full script or Marvel style?*

TOM: I guess, Marvel style. In fact, he is responsible for the majority of the plotting. He essentially tells us what he wants to do and we flesh it out and make it all fit together and hand him a very general plot. It's always interesting to see what comes of that, because Keith's imagination is so active that not until you see it pencilled do you know how it will really turn out. He's always got a new idea and, so far, we've always been able to accommodate whatever he's come up with. And we always come up with a better story that way, so it's an interesting process.

KEN: *Can you tell us about your experience with the DC New Talent Program?*

TOM: So far we haven't seen anything in print, but we have the first chapter of what will be a three-part story that looks pretty certain for publication. It's really been a good experience. Someone I can't praise too highly is **Sal Amendola** who has taken us under his wing and really helped us out.

asked to use the Elemental Lad costume."

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He's been a friend as well as a mentor, trying to help us take our first steps at DC. He tries to tell you about the business — what to expect, what to look out for. I am very impressed with him. I don't know what it'll produce down the road, but to me it's a very people-oriented program.

KEN: *What inspired you to become comic book writers?*

TOM: Mostly, the Sixties DC JUSTICE LEAGUE heroes and the LEGION. Probably my single greatest influence was **Curt Swan**, because that's what I look back on most fondly, even though he only drew a fragment of what I remember. In terms of writers, I wouldn't want to cite any, because I think at that young age the art and the colorful costumes were what was grabbing my imagination more than the writing.

MARY: I guess I was more influenced by science-fiction novels and short stories than by comic books, although I read a lot of comics. Since I couldn't draw, I spent my time writing short stories. There weren't any comic-book writers that I was influenced by, I just was influenced by comic books in general — although when **Jim Starlin** started doing the WARLOCK and CAPTAIN MARVEL stuff, I really enjoyed that.

TOM: If you asked her what inspired her to become a nurse, she'd tell you it was THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN.

MARY: That's true. Absolutely!

KEN: *How did you meet Keith Giffen?*

TOM: That's an interesting story. It has to do with Amateur Press Associations. Mary and I actually met through Interlac. We're also members of X-A.P.A., W.A.P.A., and Mary's on the waiting list for Young Heroes A.P.A. When he first started on the LEGION OF SUPER HEROES, Keith let it be known through members of Interlac that he and Paul were interested in people who were willing to look through back issues of the LEGION, do research, and find things that would be useful as stories and art references. Disobeying that particular instruction, I instead designed a bunch of uniforms and wrote out what I thought about how the LEGION should look and so on. I sent them off to Keith and he immediately called back and said he liked the designs and wanted to use them. He talked to me for an hour and seemed really pleased that someone showed enough interest to send him ideas. He told me everything that was going to be happening in the LEGION and asked if he could use the Elemental Lad costume. That was how we first got to know him. He ended up calling about five or six times, because the DC legal staff never got around to putting together the releases and making it legal for Keith to use the costume. Finally, about six months later, he had me make up my own release form and send it in. He did modify my costume somewhat. It's a little different than how I drew it, but in the original drawing some of the design details were not too clear. When we got to know Keith better, I sent him some of the stories that Mary and I had written for the A.P.A.s. He liked a few of them. Several of the characters we're still hoping to use professionally, he latched onto and tried to pitch to DC. He wanted to work with us on them. From that beginning, Keith eventually got this opportunity at Deluxe and wanted us to work with him on Lightning.

Lightning, as drawn by Keith Giffen, from T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS 2.

KEN: *Do you think that children now are as interested in reading comics as when we were young?*

MARY: From my experiences talking to children and working with them, they don't read. They're more interested in television and videos and in going out doing whatever they do that I didn't do when I was sixteen. *(Laughter.)* The majority of the A.P.A. people are over twenty-five. A few are younger — but not anywhere near the number of comics readers there were among the "baby boomers."

TOM: My suspicion is that, if we could go back in time, we would see that we who read regularly were a fairly small percentage even back then. It seems like everyone in our generation picked up a comic book at some time. There's hardly anyone our age who never read comics. They always at least read ARCHIE or DONALD DUCK. But I think that there is a crisis in the industry in that there is really nothing that addresses the eight-year-olds. Not exactly a comic book like RICHIE RICH or DONALD DUCK but to the extent of a superhero, science fiction or horror comic. There should be books like this that are so straight forward, so entertaining, such solid stories that an eight-year-old would love them. I think they pick up what's done today and there are so many words and the concepts get to be so subtle and the story is so weak that I honestly think that an eight-year-old just doesn't have the attention span to enjoy most of today's comics. Of course, we're fans today because we were fans when we were eight. The industry needs to regenerate itself, creating the lifetime fan of tomorrow.

KEN: *Are you at all limited in that you live in California? What do you think about breaking into the field from afar?*

TOM: It can be a problem, I think, in getting started — because you are just not in close touch with the major companies. If you live in New York you can go to the editors' offices once a week and drive them crazy. Just to relieve the pressure of you bothering them, they would probably give you work, while they said no to an equally-talented guy on the West Coast. I think that once you begin professional work, the distance is no problem, because you can use Express Mail. Last time we sent a script that way, though, it never showed up. Once you're rolling and have an assignment, it's not that big a deal — it's getting in touch with people in the industry to get the assignments that's hard.

MARY: I don't think there's that much

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"My inspiration is television."

prejudice against West Coast writers any more.

TOM: It's true that we all eat guacamole all day and sit around all day in our hot tubs and it fries our brains so that we can't write comics. *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *Let's talk some more about A.P.A.s.*

TOM: That's a good topic. This morning Mary and I were discussing the fact that we really wanted to talk to you about the A.P.A.s. It's an important vehicle for people who are interested in comics and want to get involved. The wonderful thing about A.P.A.s. are that they allow you to exercise your creativity on a regular basis. You get used to dealing with deadlines. If you keep missing A.P.A. deadlines you soon get the message that you don't have the ability to make the professional deadlines either. If you want to succeed badly enough, you train yourself to meet A.P.A. deadlines. You get that experience. You also throw your material before a small, intimate audience that can give you feedback which maybe you can digest better than if it's coming from total strangers. You also have the added plus of getting to know current pros or future pros who are your fellow A.P.A. members. If they see your work and like your work, someday they might be in a position to help you out.

KEN: *Besides Keith, who else would you like to work with?*

MARY: I'd like to work with **Terry Austin.**

TOM: We've met Terry and he's very nice — "a consumate professional," I think the proper phrase is. I was just thinking today how much I'd like to someday see **Curt Swan** illustrate stories for us. **George Perez** is obviously someone anyone would love to have his stories illustrated by, but my general preference tends toward the very clean, realistic type of story. **Curt Swan** says it all.

MARY: We don't like bulging muscles and grimacing.

TOM: For instance, Ultra Boy, who is my favorite Legionaire — I hate how they draw him now with bulging muscles. I am used to the original Ultra Boy, who had a rather average-or-just-above physique, and now they insist on drawing him with bulging muscles, and I just am put off by it.

KEN: *What inspires you?*

TOM: My greatest source of inspiration for comics writing is television. The crossover between television and comics is really a good one, because both deal with a mass audience. It's not an audience that's looking for the meaning of life, but it's looking for escape and entertainment. In both cases, you can do really great things with a mass audience — you can impress a lot of people and communicate a lot of fairly-sophisticated ideas, as long as you get them into the tent to see what you're doing. In both cases, you're dealing with an unfortunately limited attention span, so you've got to be entertaining. I think there should be even stronger parallels between what happens in television and what happens in comics. For example, I think HILL STREET BLUES is a very applicable example of how you can do a large group police-type comic book. Yet I'm not really sure there's been that kind of an attempt at storytelling in comics.

MARY: I think **Paul Levitz** does something similar in the LEGION, setting all these individual plotlines in motion, and then resolves them step-by-step rather than letting things go on and on.

TOM: He's also effective in utilizing so many characters. He's the first LEGION writer to really use all these characters this well. So maybe it's an example of HILL STREET BLUES type writing. When creating concepts, we often think in terms of what would make a good TV show. TV doesn't very often have special effects. It doesn't have costumes. If you can conceptualize a good TV show — then add the things you can get away with in comics — I think you've got a good concept.

KEN: *Of the professionals working today, who do you enjoy reading?*

MARY: I enjoy what **Howie Chaykin** is doing with AMERICAN FLAGG.

TOM: I've lost a lot of interest in the magazine. But I think that he is honestly one of the best writers in the business. There's a lot that I would do differently, but I basically like what **Paul Levitz** is doing with the LEGION. He's certainly one of my favorite writers. As I hope our style eventually shows, we both prefer simple, very clean writers, as opposed to the ones who try to tell you what a wonderful story they have written. We really enjoy the ones who tell their story with an economy of words, a lack of intrusion by narration. We're really for the kind of thing that **Levitz** does — which is, he tells you the story essentially through dialogue and art.

KEN: *What would you say to someone who has never read the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS that would make them want to seek out your work?*

MARY: Besides the fact that we wrote it?

TOM: That's a tough question. The thing I would like to say is that it is definitely innovative. They would not be encountering just the same old comics. I hope that there is a lack of pretension or it — we're just trying to make the series fun, not embarass you into thinking it's a great series. Trying to be entertaining and innovative.

"I'd like to get the market to take funny

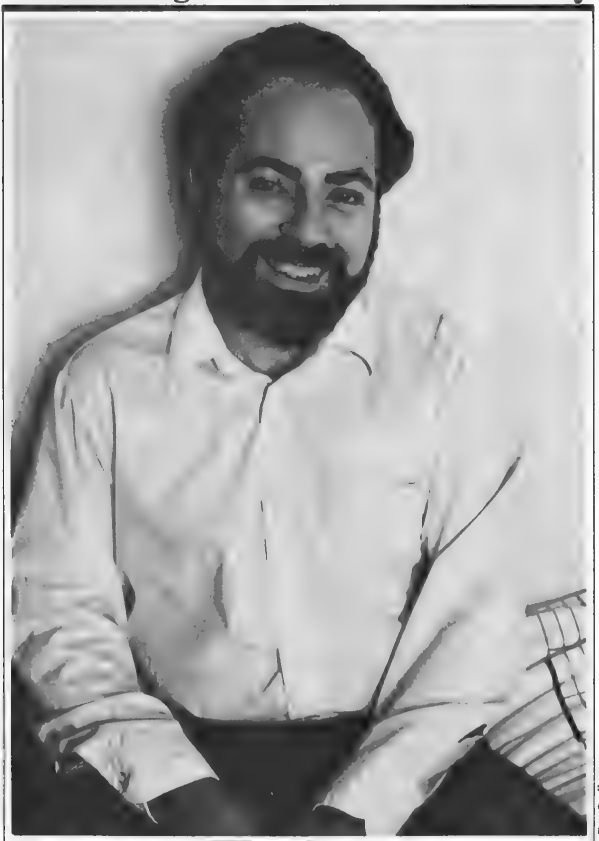

Photo: Fan Ramos

animals more seriously. (Laughter.)"

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ARN SABA

In part one of this interview, Arn discussed his influences from Carl Barks to Milton Caniff...his undisguised hatred of super-heroes ("They're really killing the comics as an art form, and the sooner super-heroes can be cut out and destroyed, the better.")...and his experiences producing comics programs for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Here in part two, the creator of NEIL THE HORSE talks about such topics as the questions you have to deal with when you're a heterosexual man. . . Los Bros. Hernandez, and Walt Disney. . . plus the thinking behind Mam'selle Poupee, Soapy and, of course, Neil the Horse!

MARK SHAINBLUM: *Do you have the same feeling about comics — the conviction that you have to do it and to hell with everything else?*

ARN SABA: You have to. At the same time, you want to be sensible. You want to be able to pay your rent so that you don't get thrown out on the streets so you can't keep drawing . You have to have a game plan. But most of the people I know who want to be artists, but can't get around to it, are bedeviled by security fears. People who say, "I'd like to be a cartoonist, I'd like to be a writer, but first of all I want to have a house so I have someplace to live while I write a novel." Come on! You're never going to do it! You have to do it in the face of adversity. Sleep on the drawing board, and have a lovely meal of macaroni and cheese, or whatever you have to do, in some friend's basement. Do what you have to. You can't let reality stand in your way.

MARK: *That's a good way to see it. I've seen people who are accountants or bookkeepers or whatever and have no security because they're at someone else's beck and call. I'd rather be my own boss.*

ARN: Exactly. There is no security anyway in this world. It's foolishness. Society is changing so fast, what good would it do me now to start putting money in the bank and trying to build up some kind of equity? I guess — I'm in my thirties now — I'll look at people, friends of mine who have gone the security route, and in a way I envy them. They've got property —

MARK: *Ulcers.*

ARN: Yeah, sure they do. And in a way I envy them. Sometimes I think, "Am I missing the boat? Shouldn't I be accumulating something more for my old age or whatever it is?" And then I think, they're not having anywhere near as exciting a life as I am. I'm having a wonderful life — the best life I can imagine. That's all that counts. I want to have a wonderful time. Girls just want to have fun — me, too! *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Girls? What are those? There aren't that many at comic conventions.*

ARN: Yeah, that's another topic — why aren't there more girls at comics conventions.

MARK: *Yeah! Let's get more women into the field!* (Laughter.)

GABRIEL MORRISSETTE: *I can't wait to be a guest, so I can have groupies!*

ARN: San Diego was great this year. There were more good-looking women at San Diego this year — a lot of people commented on that. Usually the good-looking ones are all someone else's girlfriends. And all the other ones weigh three-hundred pounds and have terminal acne.

MARK: *The men aren't much better.*

ARN: That's true. But for some reason this year there were a whole lot of really good-looking women.

MARK: *There are a lot more women interested in the field, thanks to ELFQUEST and maybe NEIL THE HORSE and things that are less macho, fighting-oriented, and more —*

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"All of us have both sexes within us."

ARN: I think that's it. The preceding two minutes of conversation will probably sound sexist, so let's redress that by having ten minutes of very consciously non-sexist conversation. *(Laughter.)* But it is true — thank goodness — that there are many more women interested in the field — from many points of view — but it's the death of the comic-book field if it doesn't widen itself out to women and children and other ethnic groups. Right now, it's entirely the preserve of seventeen-year-old white boys.

MARK: *Well, I'm a counselor at a day camp, where all the kids are black, and they all read comics.*

ARN: They do? Oh, good. I'm glad to hear that. I didn't think that comics were addressing any other ethnic groups. Well then, another of Arn's theories is shot down. Great — glad to hear it. There's nothing we can add to the discussion of women in comics that hasn't already been said by people who know about the subject better than we do, but I'm certainly glad that more women are coming into the field.

MARK: *Now that you brought up the subject, I'm curious. How do you see Mam'selle Poupee in that respect? In a recent issue you had her in shrinking dresses.*

ARN: I don't always treat her that way. There are questions that you have to deal with when you're a heterosexual man — an almost irresistible tendency — to draw women the way you want them to look, which is to say, really curvaceous and beautiful. At the same time, I have never enjoyed women who aren't really intelligent and strong and independent and doing things. All the girlfriends I've ever had — and my current girlfriend, whom I probably am gong to marry soon — is definitely one of those. She has her own life — very much so. So what I've tried to do with Poupee is combine those two. And I think that's the key to it. I've had a certain amount of flak, I must say, mostly but not entirely from women, about Poupee's rather spectacular figure. And I've given myself a lot of trouble over it. I don't just do it without thinking about it. But what I decided about it was that I don't see any reason that just because a character is "sexy" — I don't like that word — "attractive," whatever you want to say — just because a character is attractive, there isn't any reason to assume that the character isn't also smart, independent, active, talented and doing things. People assume that just because a character is sexy-looking, she's got to be a non-person. Well, that's completely absurd. All of us would like to be sexy looking and also smart. And not all of us in this room are. *(Laughter.)* So that's the way I do it. Her integrity is really important to me, in writing the character of Poupee — because I've always thought of myself as a non-traditional male — never been macho, and I have a great deal of difficulty dealing with that attitude.

MARK: *I think that speaks for everyone in the room.*

ARN: I'm sure that's the case. When I was growing up I was always being pounded by my family and schoolmates because I was not more of a "real man" and all of us have both sexes within us, both physically and mentally. So I wrote the character of Poupee very much from my own life, and my own heart and mind. Therefore it's important to me that Poupee — she's probably the most interesting character in the comic book. And she's going to continue to be prime initiator of the stories.

MARK: *Neil is incapable of initiating action because he's a child essentially.*

ARN: And Soapy is too annoyed at the world to initiate anything, except to make a few quick bucks. I've got a story planned, which I hope I will write one of these days, in which she writes and produces and stars in her own musical comedy. I just want to continue to delve right into her life, and her romantic affairs and her friendships. I really want that feeling of her being a fleshed-out character. And I'm very pleased that other men are doing that. Like the **Hernandez Brothers**, in LOVE AND ROCKETS, which I think is one of the greatest comic books ever, ever produced. MR. X as well. I want to give a glowing endorsement here to the **Hernandez Brothers**, who are so talented, and they don't even know how talented they are.

One of the many costumes designed for Mam'selle Poupee by Barb Rentch.

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Above and below: Sequence from NEIL THE HORSE, Issue 3.

GABRIEL: *They are even published in Europe by "Les Humanoides Associes" (METAL HURLANT) under the title, AMOUR, PAIN ET FUSEES. (Love, Bread and Rockets).*

ARN: I understand that's a pun on something.

PIERRE: *It means "a slice of life."*

ARN: Well, I have met the **Hernandez Brothers** a couple of times, and I complimented them very, very highly on their work, and they're so modest and surprised that I should think that they're good. They're better than I am. They're much better writers and artists, and they almost call me "sir," because I've been published for a year longer than they have. But just great guys — wonderful, nice guys, and **Jaime** in particular can draw like I've never seen before. And the writing lives right up to it. I think that's what comics ought to be. If anyone asks, " Why don't you like superheroes?" I say, "Read MR. X and LOVE AND ROCKETS, and you're never going to want to read a super-hero again in your life."

MARK: *I thought that MR. X was a story that was, to some extent, a little too "kinky" for their style. The story was a little too dark and cynical for their style.*

ARN: I know what you mean, and the interesting part of it was in that first issue — the strongest part — was the scene where Mr. X goes with the young women to a party, which is much more a **Jaime Hernandez** scene —

MARK: *Right.*

ARN: — all the beautiful young people at a party! And that's obviously something that he does best. And I agree that possibly MR. X might ultimately be a dead end for them, but at this point, nonetheless, the imagery is so strong, and they're carrying it off real well.

MARK: *I guess they wanted to do a color book.*

ARN: Well, it was brought to them, and they've taken the assignment and carried it off brilliantly. It's not really theirs. LOVE AND ROCKETS is much more from the soul. But in the next few issues it might evolve into something more from their point of view.

MARK: *Well, I see that MR. X and LOVE AND ROCKETS, from their point of view, are in the same fictional universe —*

ARN: Yeah, 'cause they brought Luba in.

MARK: *Exactly.*

ARN: Which was very clever. Yeah. Very nice. Well, it'll be interesting to see where

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"Disney was the greatest cartoon story-writer ever."

they go. Those guys are very young, all in their twenties — Jamie's about twenty-five, twenty-three, something like that — and can draw better than I'll ever draw in my life. I try for that kind of beauty of line and that kind of simplicity, and I utterly fail! I'm just not that good at drawing. But they have a long life ahead of them and I know they're just going to do great things. I have no doubt of that. Increasingly, I'm realizing my limitations as a graphic artist. I'm not as good as I would like to be and probably never will be. So I'm thinking of myself more in terms of my great hero, **Walt Disney**, who was the greatest cartoon story-writer ever, probably. So I am now working more and more with other people where I do the writing of the story, and I do the page design, and I even do the composition — I do the rough thumbnail of the picture — this is what I do with **Barb Rausch**. She will actually do the figures. I'm not very good at figures. Then I will get it back and put in the cartoonier figures, Neil and Soapy, and then I'll put in the backgrounds and do the inking. But I have no compunction at all about using other people's talents when I can't do something. It's a fun thing to do. It doesn't diminish my talents or diminish my achievements — it simply increases them. I get the best of my own work, and the best of other people's. So if I can, possibly, increase the income that I get from NEIL and use my entrepreneurial skills to bring NEIL to a wider public, I will continue to hire other people and put their best talents into my work, like the **Disney** studios.

GABRIEL: *One of the best qualities of Walt Disney, in my mind, from what I've read, is that he could take people and get the best out of them — that even they didn't know they had.*

ARN: Exactly.

GABRIEL: *Bill Tytla produced some amazing stuff for Walt Disney, but then when he went out on his own, it was like something was missing.*

ARN: And I think many people who left the **Disney** studios had the same experience. I don't want to flatter myself, but I have been told by people who have worked for me that I have done the same thing for them. Certainly **Barb Rausch** says that. And I think that's true. I am pushing her to do stuff that she's never tried before. Other people I work with — **David Roman** probably wouldn't be doing comics at all without me pushing him. So it's a nice feeling, if that's true. I can recognize what other people can do. I see the potential for what they can do. I like to think I have the same ability that **Disney** had, to see the potential in people's work, and say, "How about trying this?"

GABRIEL: *Often people can't see their own potential. The artist himself is very often blind to his own potential.*

ARN: Well, very often I can see — if I may flatter myself a little — one of my strongest abilities, the thing that sets me apart from other people, is the ability to imagine projects. The ability to think up what might be done — the potential of an artist or a project — using **Disney** terminology, again — to "plus" something, to see what something is and what something can become, or to imagine something that doesn't exist at all. I can imagine something and use other people to make it happen. It seems to be what I'm best at.

MARK: *Speaking of other projects, I'd like to get into that. You say you have other projects in mind. Anything you can discuss?*

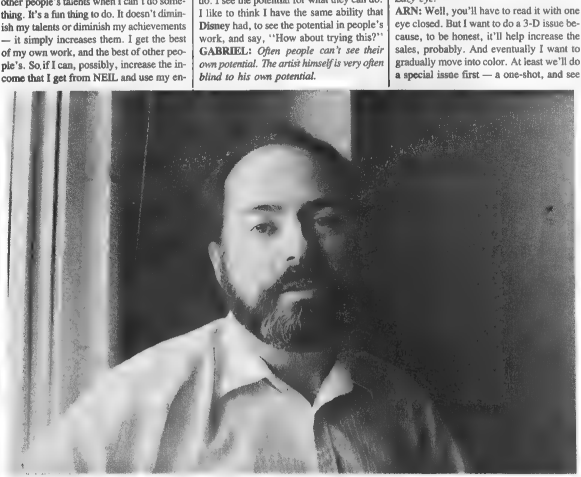
ARN: Well . . . *(Laughter.)* The big one I always want to keep under wraps. I can be sort of vague and generalize.

MARK: *Generalize. Go ahead.*

ARN: Well, to start from the smallest things, just in the next few issues one of the things I'd like to do with NEIL, is that I'd like to do a 3-D issue and increase the readership —

MARK: *Aw geez. I can't see 3-D effects. Lazy eye.*

ARN: Well, you'll have to read it with one eye closed. But I want to do a 3-D issue because, to be honest, it'll help increase the sales, probably. And eventually I want to gradually move into color. At least we'll do a special issue first — a one-shot, and see



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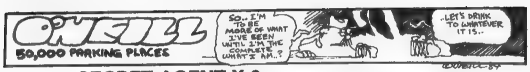

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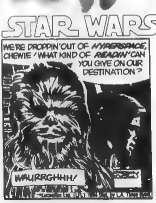

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"I think of myself as a writer more than anything."

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From the second issue of NEIL THE HORSE.

how that increases the sales. Because I think that would help.

MARK: *What about children's text stories, children's books —*

ARN: I was just going to say — we'll get into that — that I'm doing a story for EPIC, which sooner or later I want to get around to finishing.

MARK: *A NEIL story?*

ARN: A NEIL story, yeah — eight-page story, full color. I hope it will be the first of several — or millions, whatever. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, I would like to do children's books. What I'm trying to do now is expand out of the comic-book field. I don't think there's a great deal of potential for me in the comic-book field in North America at this time. Obviously, I'd like to keep bashing away at it and get the market to take funny animals more seriously, shall we say? *(Laughter.)* But, you know, I'm too old to keep bashing my head away forever. It seems stupid to do it. I've spent a great deal of my life just to get this far. Now, I'm looking to see, "What else can be done?" — using this as a stepping stone. One of course always thinks — "Animation! I'll make a million dollars! I'll have my characters on every lunch bucket in the country!" And of course I want that merchandising, which these days all ties into the fact that you just don't go into a book publisher and say, "Well, I'd like to do a children's book, please." They'll ask, "What's your merchandising? Does Mattel have an option on your characters? Do you have a producer who's going to do an animation special?" Unless you want to put out a very small, say children's book that no one's going to read, from some small publisher, which I'm not interested in. I want to do something good and exciting, so what I'm trying to do is go that commercial route. I'm talking with various agents who will have the time, which I don't have, to talk to various merchandising people, and producers. And even then there's a time problem getting together the proposals I need. But I'm working towards that. I mean, that's the way it has to go. So in the last few months I've become much more business-oriented. I've always had a little bit of that, and I finally decided that it runs in the family, and that it's necessary, at least for a while, to think in business-like terms. It's sort of weird to hear myself say these things, because I've always been very anti-establishment. I've never been very capitalistic. I have a pretty left-wing streak to me. And I hope that if I ever did set up an enterprise I would certainly construct it along more humanistic lines. It would be interesting to have sort of an alternative version of capitalism going on.

MARK: *"Capitalism With A Human Face."*

ARN: Exactly. So I'd like that. But that's how I see expansion. Whatever the expansion's going to be at this point, beyond minor expansion, has got to be something with a business structure to it. Because I'm impatient. The business structures that exist do not accommodate me and my kind of work. So I'm going to have to create a business structure.

MARK: *Carve a new doorway down the hall.*

ARN: Exactly. I'm going to really have to do that. I don't want to ever compromise the quality of what I'm doing. Check with me in ten years and see if I've got Saturday-morning animation with NEIL, because then you can say, "Hey — I thought you weren't going to compromise!"

GABRIEL: *Well, the projects of the Pinis aren't working out.*

ARN: Which ones — the animation?

GABRIEL: *Yes.*

ARN: I heard they had to buy that back.

MARK: *They have. They'll be doing it themselves. Nelvana's dropped animation for live action. Which I think is very stupid because they did good animation.*

ARN: They did good animation technically, but they had no story sense at all.

MARK: *That's true.*

ARN: They couldn't write themselves out of a paper-bag, unfortunately. That's why the ROCK'N'RULE film fell on its face. A real dud. I read the Marvel comic-book of it and I must say it left me cold. Too bad. They're very nice guys. And technically they were excellent. And **Clive Smith**, the animation director there, is a very talented guy and I feel sorry that the film didn't succeed. But they should have had a story department. I mean, that's basic, elementary.

GABRIEL: *People say, "Why doesn't animation work anymore?" "The same thing with the HEAVY METAL movie. The script was —*

MARK: *Bad.*

GABRIEL: *So-so . . .*

MARK: *Not so-so* — bad.

GABRIEL: *. . . and I know Gerald Potterton — he's the director and I met him — and he wanted to do this movie for a year and a half, and he did it in nine months, and you could see that it was done in nine months.*

Art and Stories BRIAN BOLLAND · JOHN BYRNE · DAVE GIBBONS
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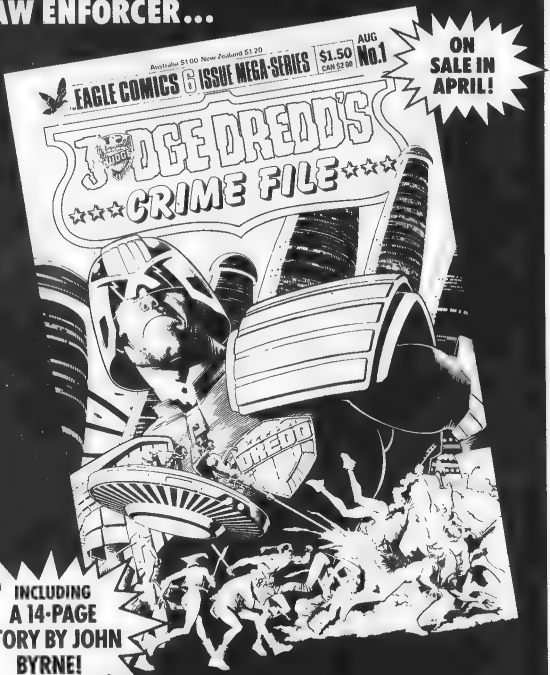

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"I have always worn odd-colored socks."

NEIL THE HORSE

ARN: I saw FIRE AND ICE, the **Frazetta** one, which was really bad, unfortunately, too —

MARK: *You would think Conway and Thomas could do a better job than that.*
ARN: The plot was unbelievably stupid. Princess gets kidnapped, then she escapes, then she gets kidnapped, then she escapes, then she gets kidnapped —

MARK: *And there was virtually no dialogue.*
ARN: — then she escapes, then she gets kidnapped, then she escapes, and it ends.

GABRIEL: *When Mark and I saw it, we said to ourselves, "Now, watch, this is going to happen," and it happened, just as we said.*

MARK: *Yeah. "This is going to happen next, then this and this and this." And that's exactly what happened.*
ARN: Isn't it amazing? I don't think there has been, in at least the last ten years and maybe longer, an animated feature that has had a good story. I guess WATERSHIP DOWN probably. But other than that —

MARK: *But in that the script contracted the story so much that it lost something.*
ARN: But it was pretty good. And that was the only one that I think made money, in the last ten years. What I'm saying —

MARK: *Didn't THE SECRET OF NIMH?*
ARN: I don't think so.

MARK: *It was a good film.*
ARN: I don't think the story was any good. I thought it was very badly constructed. They crowded too much in. They had enough plot for two films, I thought. But what I want to say is if anybody could bring me an animated feature with a really good story, and say, "Here it is, it's well animated, it's got a good story," and it didn't make money, I'd be very surprised. I think the whole idea that animated features don't make money is based entirely on the fact that they're all badly written. Why don't they see that? That's the cheapest part! You know, you can get a pen and paper and write a story! *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *I find that in visual fields — comic books, movies, TV, animation — less so in comics than the other fields — but in TV and movies especially, the writer is a nobody. He's the person who lets the other people put the stuff together.*

ARN: Yeah, that's crazy.

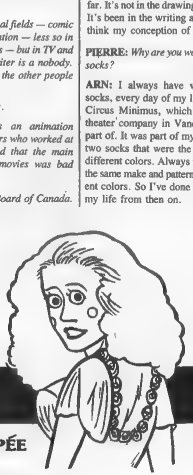
GABRIEL: *When I was an animation student, one of my teachers who worked at the film board mentioned that the main problem with the NFB movies was bad scripting.*

MARK: *National Film Board of Canada.*

ARN: I think that if I ever get to do an animated film or TV special or whatever, obviously the greatest contribution I could make, behind the camera, would be the characterization and the plot. I wouldn't even attempt to draw the animation. I wouldn't even attempt to design the animation. I really think of myself as a writer more than anything else. But I would insist that the story be 100% my story and my music, because I think that I can do that right. That's been the strength of my comics so far. It's not in the drawing — that's for sure. It's been in the writing and the concepts. I think my conception of it: My belief.

PIERRE: *Why are you wearing odd-colored socks?*

ARN: I always have worn odd-colored socks, every day of my life, since I was in Circus Minimus, which is the children's theater company in Vancouver that I was part of. It was part of my costume to wear two socks that were the same pattern but different colors. Always the same socks — the same make and pattern — but two different colors. So I've done that every day of my life from then on.



MAM'SELLE POUPÉE

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"I work when I feel like it, and when

I don't want to work, I don't."

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DAVE COCKRUM

Unless you just arrived from the far reaches of Barsoom, you're familiar with the comics work of Cockrum. Dave's been a force in the field since the early Seventies, and Edgar Rice Burroughs enthusiasts still recall his art on both DC and Marvel's versions of JOHN CARTER OF MARS with fondness. And can anyone forget what he and Len Wein did to create and establish the new X-MEN?

Most recently, Dave produced THE FUTURIANS graphic novel for Marvel, and he is currently hard at work writing and drawing a new NIGHTCRAWLER mini-series, while firing the imaginations of fans with all new adventures of one of his first loves, Wally Wood's T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *You've been in comics for quite a few years now.*

DAVE COCKRUM: I got into the field in 1970, so that makes it fourteen years.

DWIGHT: *You were on staff at Marvel for a number of those years — how is the life of a full-time freelancer different?*

DAVE: Well, one thing nice about being on staff is that it sure is comforting to have a regular check every two weeks. The thing about freelancing is that if you don't do the work, you don't get the money. To paraphrase **Mel Brooks**, "You don't put out, you don't get any."

Personally, I'm too disorganized and too disliking of authority to enjoy working in a staff position for any length of time. If I enjoyed working under authority, I probably would have stayed in the Navy. I tend to like to work when I feel like it, and when I don't want to work, I don't. That's probably why I don't turn out as much work as some of the other prople. My wife is sitting here listening to me and looking heavenward!

DWIGHT: *How did you get involved with Wally Wood's T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS?*

DAVE: They called and asked if I'd like to do it. I was a long-time fan of the old T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. In fact, I have a complete set of the Tower comics. That was one of my favorite series from the Sixties.

DWIGHT: *Which of the agents is your favorite character?*

"Chris and I were going to do Nightcrawler

DAVE: Dynamo — largely because there was usually a solid humor element to all of his stories. Dynamo is a somewhat naive, good-natured farmboy from Iowa. He's even-tempered. He's pretty much got his head together. He's unflappable. But, at the same time, you could sell him the Brooklyn Bridge if you had the right story. He was fun! He has this belt that will give him thirty minutes of super power and invulnerability. And yet he can be conned into forgetting the passage of time. So, before he knows it, the power gets shut off and he's plain old Len Brown again.

DWIGHT: *The first issue has re-introduced virtually all the characters, even if some only appeared in a one-panel cameo. Does the next issue show them in more fleshed-out roles?*

DAVE: No, unfortunately not. I guess the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Squad is off in oblivion or wherever. Personally, I would like not to have to draw Undersea Agent, because I thought his stories in the Sixties were stupid. I never cared for him. However, he is going to be a pretty prominent character in the third issue. Undersea Agent had his own book, so was not really connected that much with T.H.U.N.D.E.R. His stories had nothing to do with the organization, yet there was supposed to be a tenuous link binding them. Usually an entirely different artist was doing it, and they probably had a different writer for the book, as well. To this day, I don't know who was responsible for the art — but I hated it. **Gil Kane** did a few Undersea Agent stories, and as far as I'm concerned, they're the only decent ones in the whole run. But **David Singer** wants to use Undersea Agent, as well, so let's hope we do him better than Tower did.

DWIGHT: *What sort of input do you have on the storylines?*

DAVE: Well, **Singer** knows I was a big fan, and he's aware that I have a lot of ideas. I've talked to him several times and suggested a number of story elements. I know he's using some of them. For instance, with Lightning's suit — which is actually killing him — why don't they take that suit off the mortal and give it to the immortal android, No-man? So I believe there is a story coming up that will deal with that problem. I often do not come up with full story ideas — rather, they're springboards and those Dave listens to pretty closely.

DWIGHT: *What is their reprint policy like?*

DAVE: It's very generous, assuming of course that there will be reprints done. But it is a nice deal, that was another one of the reasons why THE FUTURIANS is with **Singer**.

DWIGHT: *You will be writing THE FUTURIANS as a series for Deluxe Comics, as well as drawing it?*

DAVE: Right.

DWIGHT: *Since THE FUTURIANS first appeared as a Marvel Graphic Novel, how did it end up at Deluxe Comics?*

DAVE: Well, the contract for THE FUTURIANS read that if I was made a better offer and Marvel wouldn't match it, I would be free to go. David made a substantially better offer. And, since Marvel has a lot of their own properties, they let me take THE FUTURIANS to him with their blessing. It was a very amicable arrangment.

DWIGHT: *So this seems to indicate to you that Singer Publishing is going to be around for a while?*

DAVE: I certainly hope so.

DWIGHT: *What will be the storyline of THE FUTURIANS series?*

DAVE: Well, I haven't written the thing up yet — but I've been shaping the storyline in my head. Amongst other things, I'm going to have to deal with the repercussions of what's happened after all those meteors dropped on the major cities of the world.

The Futurians: Avatar, Werehawk, Terrayne the Earthmover, Blackmane, Mosquito, Silver Shadow, and Silkie – from Cockrum's FUTURIANS graphic novel for Marvel Comics.

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JOHNATHAN DARKNYT IS SILVER SHADOW.

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together. He came up with a plot I didn't like."

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From the forthcoming NIGHTCRAWLER mini-series written and drawn by Dave Cockrum.

This is something that didn't occur to me, back when I produced the graphic novel. Worldwide economics, communications and just about everything else has been disrupted or destroyed. Millions of people have been killed, and the capital cities of several of the world powers have been obliterated. So we'll see what will happen in the aftermath.

DWIGHT: *Are you doing anything else?*

DAVE: I'm working on a four-issue NIGHTCRAWLER mini-series for Marvel.

DWIGHT: *Can you tell us anything about it?*

DAVE: Well, that's running late, too. Marvel is annoyed about **Singer** and **Singer** is annoyed about Marvel. *(Laughter.)* Trying to work on one makes the other one late. But I've got three of the NIGHTCRAWLER issues pencilled and written. I'm doing all of the chores on it — pencilling, inking and writing. And my wife, **Paty**, is doing the coloring. This is the same team that did THE FUTURIANS. It's a four-issue swashbuckler. High adventure and fun.

DWIGHT: *This seems to be your trademark.*

DAVE: I've always enjoyed a good, fast-moving story with a lot of action, of course — and also a lot of humor. Not that I want to turn every story into a comedy, or anything like that, but a good adventure story usually has a lot of humor in it, as well. When I was really into comics, it was the early days of SPIDER-MAN, when **Stan Lee** was fun to read! He may have had his soap-opera problems, but his stories were fun, too. It was a ball to read. So I'm trying to do the stories now that I liked to read when I was young.

DWIGHT: *Can you tell us what will be happening in the NIGHTCRAWLER story?*

DAVE: Well, NIGHTCRAWLER is inadvertantly sent into a dimensional warp and winds up be-bopping around a number of different dimensions without any control over where he's going and how he's getting there. Kitty and Ilyana are kind of the cause of that. Beyond that, I don't want to say much else, except that if you recall that story that **Jo Duffy** and I did for BIZARRE ADVENTURES featuring the Well at the End of the Universe — well, that is the springboard for this mini-series. Nightcrawler winds up running around with sky pirates in sky ships with floating cities and a beautiful princess and a nasty wizard who looks like a shark and all kinds of stuff like that. And he winds up also meeting all the characters from Kitty's fairy tale. And it gets wilder and wilder.

DWIGHT: *Did you talk to Chris Claremont about this?*

DAVE: Very little, actually. Chris and I were going to do a NIGHTCRAWLER story together at one point a few years back. He came up with a plot I didn't like, and I didn't want to do it. So nothing happened for a long time. Then one day **Louise Simonson**, when she was editor of the X-MEN, called me up and asked me if I'd like to do one myself. And I leaped at the chance. I really did not consult with Chris at all. That is why there will be no major tie-in with the X-MEN continuity, nor any big change in the characters' lives. That's because if I did something Chris didn't like that affected the continuity in X-MEN or NEW MUTANTS, he'd just undo it in the regular title. So this is like a four-issue "time-out for Nightcrawler."

DWIGHT: *So you're pretty busy?*

DAVE: Yes, that's right. One of the reasons I took on this heavy of a workload was in the hopes of being able to produce the work faster. Unfortunately, it hasn't really worked. Once, someone at Marvel suggested they make eight or ten clones of me. And I asked why, because then you'd have eight or ten more late artists. *(Laughter.)*

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"People are not lining up to draw LEGION."

KEITH GIFFEN

I first became familiar with Keith's artwork on Marvel's DEFENDERS, back when it was written by a certain publisher of a certain magazine you are now holding. I've always liked Keith's art and have enjoyed watching how it's grown and changed over the years.

So imagine my surprise and delight when DC editor Janice Race informed me that Keith would be drawing a WORLD'S FINEST story I had full-scripted!

A number of weeks later, after we'd discussed plans for a sequel to that story, Keith went on to tell me what else he's been working on, and the result of that conversation follows.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *How did you come to be drawing for Deluxe Comics, when you're so closely identified with DC these days?*

KEITH GIFFEN: David Singer from Deluxe called — he wanted me to draw some T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents stories and one of the characters he mentioned was Lightning. So I thought about it a bit, and I told David that I'd like to do some really horrible things to Lightning. David said,"Fine." Then I told him, okay, that I'd also like to plot it. He said,"Fine." Then I thought, you know, that I had to find a way to make this nice guy say"no" to me. So I then told him that I wanted to bring in writers that no one had ever heard of, and had never had a professional comic-book credit. And David said,"Fine with me." So I decided that I could work with this guy. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Weren't you under contract to DC Comics, Keith?*

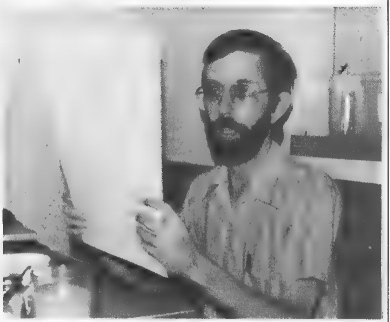
KEITH: I was under contract to DC at the time, but I was still open to working on other things which I could do when my contract expired. But I didn't want any heavy, long-term commitments. I had spent three years doing THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES which is probably one of the hardest books at DC. Believe me, people are not lining up outside editor **Karen Berger's** door to draw the Legion. So I didn't want to immediately go from the Legion to another regular monthly book.

DWIGHT: *What are your feelings about the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES now that you're off the series?*

KEITH: I love what's happening with the book now. I think that **Steve Lightle** is doing a bang-up job. I love being able to pick a copy up and see how Paul and Steve are extrapolating on ideas I had. And they're doing some of the stuff better!

DWIGHT: *Enough time must have now*

Keith admires his latest work.



"I did things with Batman. Somebody's go-

passed for you to read it almost as if you were a new reader coming to the comic.

KEITH: Yes, I've pretty well removed myself from LEGION. You can get too close to a concept sometimes. When that happens, you lose your sense of perspective. After seeing what **Lightle, Shoemaker** and what **Jurgens** are doing now — looking through all those issues, I can go back and look at the stories I did, and it's like reading my stories for the first time!

DWIGHT: *Following up on your work on the LEGION, I reread your interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #1, and in it one of the things you mentioned was that you wanted to kill off Karate Kid.*

KEITH: And I left before I could do it! That is my one big regret, that I couldn't stick around long enough to off him. *(Laughter.)* In the beginning, one of my conditions for doing the LEGION was that Karate Kid's days were numbered. And then, when the book went over to being printed on Baxter paper, Paul and I figured we'd do this big Legion of Super-Villains thing and it would culminate with Karate Kid's death. Unfortunately, I just couldn't get past that second Baxter issue. It was like I had just overloaded — I'm not going to use the words burned out, because I didn't burn out. I guess after three years, I didn't want to do the LEGION anymore. I still hung around long enough to block out the sequences, though. As much as I could, I wanted to have a hand in the story. Then, finally, Karate Kid dies — and I didn't do it! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What was it like working with Paul Levitz?*

KEITH: One of the fun things about working with a writer like **Paul Levitz** is that Paul thinks on his feet. Remember "Omen and the Prophet"? That is the one story that Paul and I did that really was split 50-50. It was also a real love/hate thing. Readers either loved the story or they hated it. In it, Paul had no idea that the Invisible Kid was coming back. That was my idea, so I drew him into the story. And I handed in the pages without saying anything. Then, a week later, I got a call from Paul saying, "What is this. Where did *he* come from?" *(Laughter.)* And then Paul started doing little one-upmanship things to me. We did that a lot with each other for a long time. Paul would write a sequence and, like I told you in the thing with Invisible Kid, I'd figure a way to twist the sequence around. Then Paul would see what I did, and he'd recognize immediately that what I did was not in his plot. So he'd write the sequence in such a way that when the story later bounced back to me, like in the next issue, he'd have carried the idea a little bit further — with the result that he tossed it all in my lap! The ball got tossed back and forth a lot. One-upmanships you could call it, or bouncing ideas — I did it to you in WORLD'S FINEST.

DWIGHT: *I know.* (Laughter.)

KEITH: It was a fun story, a real fun story. I wish **Janice Race** would get around to scheduling it. I did all these nice little things with Batman . . .I keep looking at the pages and saying that somebody's going to do what I did and get his story published first. And that person will be acclaimed a genius. *(Laughter.)* I came up with an idea of how to treat Batman which I felt was pretty original.

DWIGHT: *You rearranged the pacing of the story — and I had to refit all my copy!*

KEITH: The linear form of your story was there — it's just that I broke up some of the panels. I could understand the way you had to work. This was an inventory story. Lots of times, when I pick up an inventory story, I realize that you — the writer — don't know who the artist will be. You have to write it in the most basic terms. You can't write for an artist's strengths — because you don't know who the artist will be. I don't understand how writers can do inventory stories blind like that — when it's done just sit back and wait to see who will draw it.

DWIGHT: *It takes a great leap of faith.* (Laughter.)

KEITH: It does!

DWIGHT: *No one was more surprised than I was when Janice told me you would be drawing "The Search."*

KEITH: I was looking around for something to do that was different, and Janice said, "I have this urban story that takes place in the city, it's very gritty and urban." And I had just been talking about wanting to do that kind of story. Janice told me, "Read it, and if you like it and want to do it, fine. If not, no hard feelings." I read it, and it was a nice tight little story. And it has no supervillains! Thank God! Sometimes I really get tired of seeing any sort of super villain crawl out of the woodwork to justify the mechanics of the story. What I liked was that Batman and Superman don't even know the villain exists! It's the normal, human, woman cop from Minnesota who actually takes care of him. She's the real protagonist in the story. She is the most important person in the story. To me, Batman played the role of the Greek chorus. Of course, Batman does his job to stop the villain in the end, but it is this ordinary woman who commits the real heroic act. What was really important to me was that this story could have maintained the same flow — the same tension — and not have had a super-hero in it.

Those are the kind of stories I like to do now, rather than the group of super-heroes getting together to save the world from some

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ing to do what I did and be acclaimed a genius."

huge menace — or because earth is going to explode. Your story was a lot closer to home with its theme.

The Menthor story I drew for T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS was much the same thing. Menthor wasn't going up against a world-beater. She was fighting a punk that any cop with a good head on his shoulders could have handled. Menthor put a lot more into it, of course. But this was an entertaining story that could have still been entertaining without the super hero.

DWIGHT: *What are you doing for DC right now?*

KEITH: I'm putting the finishing touches on a Legion of Substitute Heroes story. And I've been doing some little back-up stories — Hukka stories for ATARI FORCE. They are a nice change of pace. And there's an OMEGA MEN ANNUAL that **Mike DeCarlo** and I are doing eight pages for.

DWIGHT: *That should be interesting!*

KEITH: Yes. I told **Todd Smith** to put in lots of Broot because I like Broot.

DWIGHT: *You and quite a few others.*

KEITH: One of the fun things about not having a steady book is that you're available when all sorts of interesting stories come up. You're not in the terrible position of turning something down because you don't have enough time. But, on the other hand, one of the things I miss by not being on a regular book is that I'm not around to see it evolve. I miss watching the thing grow. You miss out on the feedback. Like on the LEGION, there is always lots of letters. I never felt I was working in a vacuum with that. Unfortunately, you never get the same sort of feedback from a one-issue thing. The letters that do come in tend to focus on the creative team, rather than the series. But, when an artist, or a writer, stays on the title for a while, he gets a real feel of what the readers think about the direction the comic is taking. When that happens you no longer get a **Keith Giffen**, a **George Perez** or a **Frank Miller** letter, you get a letter devoted to the series. I really do think that is the way it should be. I think that there should be more of a following for the book itself, and not the creative team. This sounds strange coming from me.

DWIGHT: *Since you do have a following of your own.*

KEITH: It's true, though. One of the fun things about working on the LEGION was that there are a lot of LEGION fans. They'll buy the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES if I draw it, if George draws it, or if some unknown draws it. They like the book, they like the characters and they care about what happens to the series. That's one of the reasons why its popularity has been so strong.

DWIGHT: *What about the AMBUSH BUG mini-series?*

KEITH: All four issues are in the house — a mini-series that will come out on time! Can you believe it. There's nothing more embarrassing than blowing the deadline on a mini-series. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *I read the Ambush Bug story in ACTION #565 that has the publicity agents*

These two pages and overleaf: Keith's art for an upcoming issue of WORLD'S FINEST COMICS, written by Dwight Zimmerman.

HELENA IS NOT ALONE IN HER ANGUISH. FOR IN THE FOREST RIVER CEMETERY, BATMAN, TOO, IS SUFFERING.
THE INSTRUCTIONS WERE EXPLICIT--COME ALONE. STILL I MADE A PROMISE TO HELENA.
YET SOMETHING CAUSED ME TO NOT CONTACT HER--AND TO AGREE TO HER SISTER'S DEMAND.
WHY?
SNAP!
A TWIG CRUNCHING UNDERFOOT... IT MUST BE...
ASTRID CLAYSON! THEN YOU ARE ALIVE AFTER ALL!
SHE STIFFENS AT THE WORDS, AS IF THEY ARE A DAMNING INDICTMENT.
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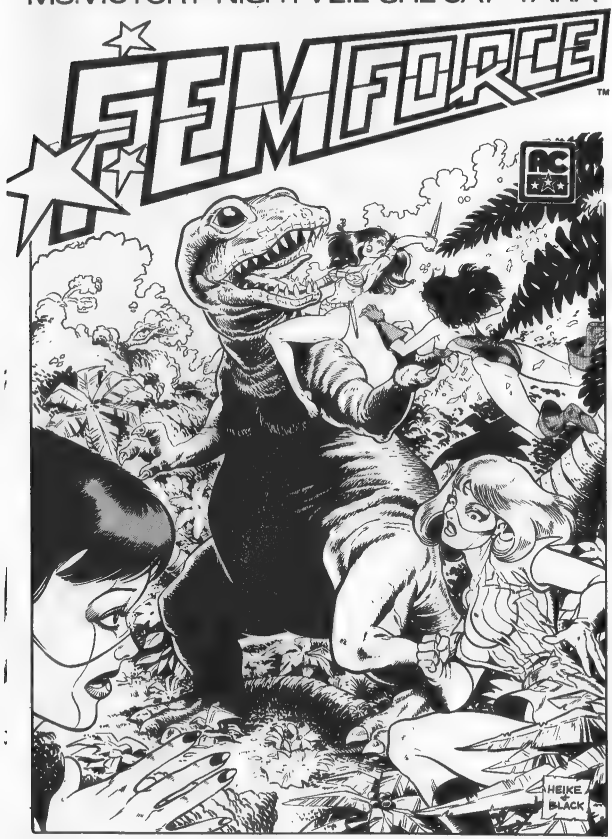
NOW IN THEIR OWN BI-MONTHLY BOOK!
MS. VICTORY-NIGHTVEIL-SHE CAT-TARA



"The editor is going to hear the garbage."

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Peabody, Dicker and Pending. I howled reading that.

KEITH: We were all really nervous about that story. Justifiably so, I think. The first two Bug stories were slightly off the wall, but they didn't launch themselves out to left field like what happens in this story. **Julie Schwartz** originally intended to put our story at the front of the book. But when he saw the splash page, he said, "I can't put this up front!" so it went in its usual spot in the back. And Julie was right, you can't put it up front. It's just a chubby guy standing there and talking. But this is the story where the whole Ambush Bug thing came together for **Bob Fleming** and me. And the mini-series pushes everything we've done even further. It actually makes some of the stuff we did in ACTION look straight. I'm really happy with the mini-series.

DWIGHT: *I liked the word play — the puns and visual gags like "It's Curby Magik!" and other parodies.*

KEITH: Yes, I just hope that it all comes across as we intended — that we are doing affectionate parodies. Bob, Julie and I were not standing around saying, "Who can we take the scalpel to next?" All of what went into AMBUSH BUG is stuff that I remember when I was a kid, when I was reading comics more seriously. **Jack Kirby** was everywhere, it seemed. Jack was at Marvel then. And the "team book" then — well, nowadays everything is team book, team book, team book! I guess the whole series of stories gently pokes fun at all the things that comic-book fans have been aware of all along. But one of the things that I asked Bob to do about these gags was that if the joke itself only applied to comics, that he shouldn't use it. But if the gag is humorous by itself, and you can add an interesting twist by easily including a comic-book reference to it, then it should be used. This is why you have the **Jack Kirby** swipe on the Ambush Bug figure. That page in ACTION #565 was a parody of Marvel. But the basic gag was the stretching and throwing of the Ambush Bug shape into something that he obviously doesn't belong — a standard cartoon gag.

DWIGHT: *I saw some of the pencilled pages that Bob had in the office one day featuring Quantas —*

KEITH: Ah, yes — the koala bear that walks like a man. He shows up in the second issue of the mini-series. We timed the appearances of Ambush Bug so that after his three appearances in ACTION, he'd be in that issue of DC PRESENTS. Then we skipped a month — February — and in March the mini-series starts. We play a lot of games in the mini-series. For instance, the third issue of it is what we basically call "The Ambush Bug History of the DC Universe."

Keith's innovative way to illustrate The Batman.

DWIGHT: *What was Julie's reaction to this as you and Bob were bringing in the stories?*

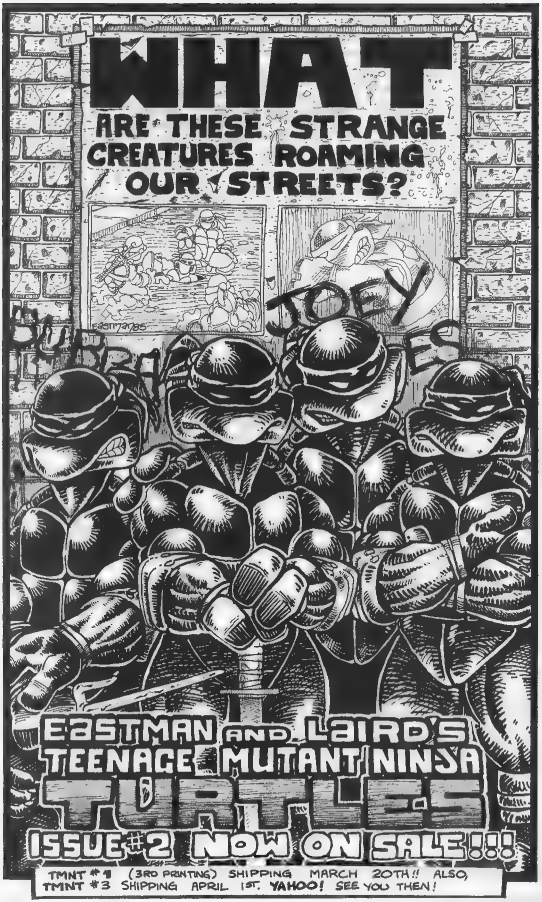
KEITH: There was a lot of amazement in the office. People looked at the pages and then said, "**Julie Schwartz** is editing this?" I think there has been a lot of misunderstanding about the guy. Maybe he had a lot of bad press or something. He's been real supportive. He likes what's going on. He likes the character. He still is protective of Ambush Bug, which is nice. Everyone working on Ambush Bug likes him. **Bob Oksner**, the inker, was very excited about doing the stories. As a matter of fact, Julie has contributed a number of gags we've used.

DWIGHT: *Describe the mechanics of doing a story for Julie.*

KEITH: I'll sit down in Julie's office and tell him what I'd like to do. Then he says, "Spell it out for me." So I go home, work out my idea in detail. And as I'm doing that, I discover that my idea is changing into something different from what I told Julie in the office. Then, when I bring the thing back, the changes haven't bothered him at all. Julie is more concerned about going too far — losing the audience. Julie's a good reining-in influence. Sometimes he'd say, "You just went beyond the bounds of reader comprehension." And nine times out of ten, when he says that, he's right. The tenth time, if I can make my point, we get it my way. If I can't we go with what Julie says. It's really strange, this business we're in.

DWIGHT: *How so?*

KEITH: Well, if the book is a rampaging success — SWAMP THING, for instance, has really taken off lately. **Alan Moore, Steve Bissette** and **John Totelben.** All are talented people. They deserve all the acclaim they're getting. But if the book nose-dives, who gets blamed? The editor, **Karen Berger.** You have to keep that in mind, too, when you are working on stories. The editor is the one who is going to hear all the garbage that goes down. If anything goes wrong, or if we step on anybody's toes.


WHAT
ARE THESE STRANGE CREATURES ROAMING OUR STREETS?
JOEY
EASTMAN AND LAIRD'S
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA
TURTLES
ISSUE #2 NOW ON SALE!!!
TMNT #1 (3RD PRINTING) SHIPPING MARCH 20TH!! ALSO,
TMNT #3 SHIPPING APRIL 1ST. YAHOO! SEE YOU THEN!

"I'm not giving Peter Parker a punk hairdo."

DWIGHT: *Will you be doing more work for Julie?*

KEITH: Two things are definite. I'll be doing a SUPERMAN SPECIAL. These are annual-like things printed in Germany and designed for the European market. Later they are published here as specials. I'm going to be doing one of those for Germany. It's a superman/Braniac story. I'm really going to get into the "organic machine" idea. Julie and I are shooting around the plot. It's funny, it seems like the AMBUSH BUG team will continue to follow me onto this as well. **Bob Oksner** might ink it and **Bob Fleming** will be doing the dialog. We tend to think alike, so it makes working together that much easier. Also, I'll be adapting a **Robert Bloch** story for a DC graphic novel.

DWIGHT: *Which one?*

KEITH: It's called "Hell on Earth." It's a very obscure, old story. It's a visually exciting story. I love **Bloch's** stuff. I've read work of his that people haven't heard of, like "Serpent in Eden." Most people link **Robert Bloch** with PSYCHO and that's it. Almost like the man came out of nowhere, wrote one story, and retired. The man has been doing other stuff! And this graphic novel will almost be the first — in fact, it will be the first DC graphic novel that will not be fantasy or science fiction.

DWIGHT: *It's also the first one developed from a literary property.*

KEITH: You just watch! Julie has a drawerful of surprises just waiting to be used! He's got properties from guys like **Isaac Asimov, Poul Anderson** — you name the science-fiction author and, ten to one, he's got a story from that author in his drawer. It's going to be nice for DC to do graphic novels that aren't just overblown comics. No offense intended against the people doing them, but why do a JUSTICE LEAGUE graphic novel or a WARLORD graphic novel, when you can do a **Robert Bloch** graphic novel. Or a DORSAI graphic novel?

DWIGHT: *You are working on a SPIDER-MAN story, too, aren't you?*

KEITH: Yes, with **Bill Mantlo.** This is probably the one-and-only SPIDER-MAN story I'm going to draw. I'm trying to do something special with it. I'm approaching the character from my own angle. For instance, when I got the inventory assignment — and I would not have done the story if it had been anything but an inventory — I did not go back and reread all the old **Ditko** stories. I asked for a handful of recent back issues so I could get the reference about the major characters and locations down. I'm, not doing anything horribly radical. I'm not changing his costume or giving Peter Parker a punk hairdo or anything like that.

DWIGHT: *Aw shucks!* (Laughter.)

KEITH: I'm just trying to approach the character and story in a way I feel comfortable with and that won't violate what Marvel expects of me. They're paying the checks, and they have every right to tell me how far I can go. And I will go the limit.

DWIGHT: *You have any other irons in the fire?*

KEITH: Yes, there is a LEGION story I'm working on — an annual.

DWIGHT: *A-ha!*

KEITH: That's a *probable!* I'll be doing it with Paul, of course. It's a different kind of story. And it'll be a pleasure to go back to the 30th Century. I keep up with the book because there are only about 36 different characters in the LEGION, and you have to know every one of them. I have a Bouncing Boy story coming up soon. **Ernie Colon** did the lead story for that issue, and I did the back-up. The Bouncing Boy story is fun, one with a humorous slant. The editors seem to come to me now when they want something a little offbeat. And I can always count on Julie to keep me busy. Thank God. I enjoy working with him. I'd really like to continue doing AMBUSH BUG. I really have high hopes for the Bug. He could still nose-dive, that is a possibility — but I hope not!

DWIGHT: *We're almost at the end of the tape, any last comments?*

KEITH: No, not really, we've been talking for quite a while — wait there is one: Buy the Bug! *Buy! Buy! Buy!*

Cover for the much-acclaimed AMBUSH BUG mini-series. Keith is also at work on the March Hare, a new character for Deluxe Comics -- described as a cross between Ambush Bug and the Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

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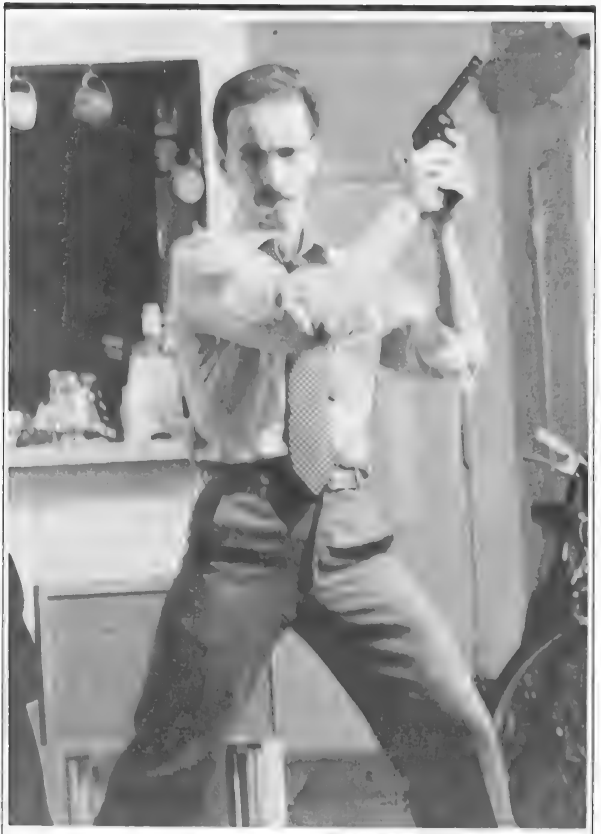
"A lot of colorists don't have the back-



ground to color comics, period."

GREG THEAKSTON

Looking a bit like William Powell from the THIN MAN movies, a dapper Greg Theakston ushered me into his small,comfortable studio, whose every inch seemed to be crammed with framed artwork, movie posters, '30s graphics, and a vintage collection of toys and models — including such rare kits as "Big Frankie," a 2½-foot-high cute Frankenstein monster from the '60s, and a set of truly bizarre Weird-Ohs cars from the same period. And somehow, crammed in among all this, Bill Wray quietly sat at a drawing table opposite Greg's, inking George Perez pencils for a T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS story.

Dressed in charcoal grey slacks and a white dress shirt complete with starched front and french cuffs, Theakston looked very much a confident, polished professional. As the interview progressed, that impression deepened as he discussed the aesthetic verities and the nuts-and-bolts realities of his trade at a time when comic-book coloring is in transition as never before...

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *Greg, how did you come to be coloring comics?*

GREG THEAKSTON: For the past four or five years I've been doing paperback covers. But I was interested in comics way back when I was a little kid and wanted to get into comics for a long time. I was diverted from that shortly after graduation from high school — instead, I got into illustration of paperbacks. So for the past ten or so years, I've been experimenting with color blending, contrast, tones, and learning a little bit about artwork doing that. I've done a couple of hundred professional assignments since '78 — everything from Western paperbacks to romance and science fiction to storyboarding for TV commercials. I worked with **Neal Adams** at Continuity Associates for a long time, doing coloring up there for storyboard work — and, while he's one of the masters of color in comics, he didn't teach me all that much.

STEVE: *Yet we've never seen your name in the comics credits as a colorist, Greg — until now. How'd you come to be working on THE HUNGER DOGS?*

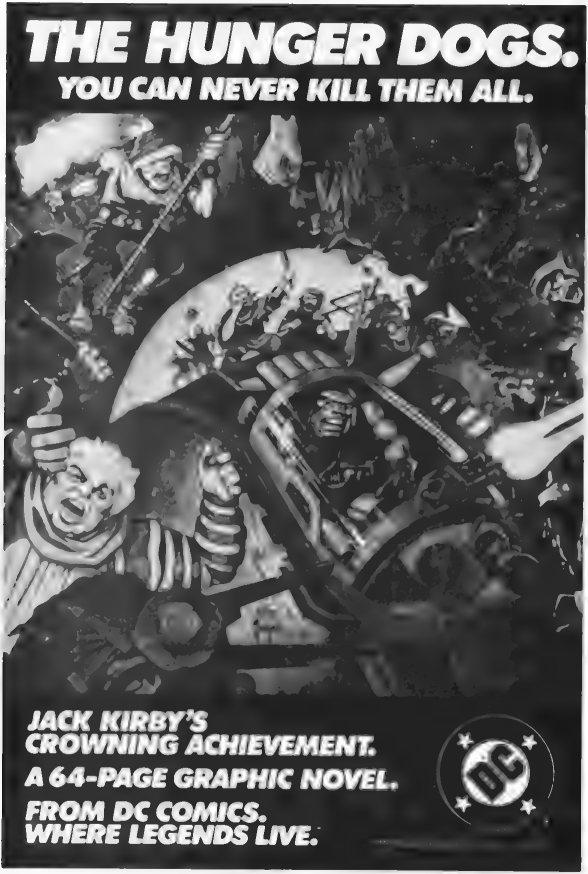
GREG: There was an inconsistency in the artwork because **D. Bruce Berry** inked half the book, and **Mike Royer** inked the other half. Now **Royer** had inked a whole issue of the NEW GODS, the last story of the saga, which they felt was not exciting enough and was not a cliffhanger. So they took those pages and photo-statted them, badly, so that each line that was placed down by **Royer** was about a third thicker than it had originally been, so that it looked like it was very crudely inked, with very little delicate work. And then **D. Bruce Berry** — who's got an extremely light, fine line — did the other stuff, so there's just incredible contrast between the two styles. I asked DC if I could have permission to go back and sort of realign everything to a consistent look. They said okay, and I did that. Also, about a year ago, I'd seen them about doing covers, and knew a cover would have to be done for this. I'd known **Jack Kirby** for a long time and thought it would be a good idea for me to do it, so I took the idea to DC and they said, "Sure — and by the way, the story has to be colored, too. Do you want to do that?" So, this is really my first coloring assignment in comics.

STEVE: *Did you paint over Kirby's pencils for the cover?*

GREG: Jack's pencils were transcribed to canvas and hand painted in oil. It was traced off, so the painting's the same size as the original artwork. Jack's pencils still exist.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Greg Theakston
Occupation: Illustrator and colorist
Born: 21 November 1953 – Detroit, Michigan.
Residence: New York City since 1978
Credits: As soon as I graduated from high school, literally a month later, I went to work for Steranko for a year. I helped him found Supergraphics, then moved to Detroit, did illustration, eventually ending up at Continuity, where I was one of the original Crusty Bunkers, working on the very first job signed Crusty Bunkers... I ghosted pages of DR. STRANGE for **Brunner**, Giordano on WONDER WOMAN, worked on every Crusty Bunker job. My publishing company, Pure Imagination, published THE WRIGHTSON TREASURY, the ADAMS TREASURIES... I wrote a job for CREEPY #36, I colored over 100 paperback covers, TV GUIDE illustrations. Most recently, inking and coloring Kirby's THE HUNGER DOGS.
Favorite Color: Purple
Favorite Comics: Any Kirby comics, DC Silver Age stuff (specifically SUPERMAN), BATMAN, Ditko's SPIDER-MAN, Kubert's war material, Steranko's NICK FURY, anything Gil Kane has done in the last ten years.
Pet Peeve: People not doing their jobs well.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"Dr. Martin's dyes are to mark bacteria."

It was the first time Jack had ever been painted and it was a real privilege to get a chance to do that.

STEVE: *Had you ever worked with Jack before?*

GREG: Yeah. I did the JACK KIRBY TREASURY, Volume One — and TREASURY, Volume Two, is coming out shortly.

STEVE: *Did you also color the cover for that?*

GREG: Yes, in the same style. In fact, that got me the job inking SUPER POWERS #5 — the last one, drawn by Jack. I wanted to color that one, too, but **Gafford** had done the first four and it really wasn't my place to knock him out of his job, though I will be inking SUPER POWERS PART TWO, the second set of six books coming out next year.

STEVE: *Is Jack working on those also?*

GREG: Jack will pencil all six from scripts by **Paul Kupperberg**. We had a plot session and, being a big fan of **Kirby**, I had some things to interject that I know Jack will do well. The plot is tailor-made for Jack's talents.

STEVE: *Tell us about color you used on HUNGER DOGS.*

GREG: It's called blueline process. My coloring is shot separately by laser scanning. And the black line art is shot as a solid black line. So you get the variations of grey and everything from the blue line colors, and the black line is the holding line. Sometimes you'll see a guy who colors his actual artwork, physically colors his artwork...

STEVE: *Who?*

GREG: Scott Hampton, for instance. And what you'll find in that situation is that the separations picked up the variations of the black line — so if he colored in a shadow, and his ink was weak, instead of having a solid black line, you'll have a grey area, and it looks less like a comic book. I prefer that real solid black holding line.

STEVE: *But then there's somebody like Arthur Suydam whose stuff is really lively...*

GREG: That's true. But he doesn't rely so much on a black holding line like **Kirby**, whose strictly that powerful, simple, hard stroke. Arthur will do beautiful variations of color to give you contour. On the **Kirby** book, THE HUNGER DOGS, Jack isn't interested in contour. He's interested in giving you a solid, punchy image. If we were coloring **Al Williamson**, who's at the other end of the spectrum, the colors would probably be much more delicate and the blends would be much more subtle — but because **Kirby** is to the point in his approach, I felt the coloring should be that way, too. In fact, it's more like animation colors than a full painting.

STEVE: *Give me an example of how you would color Kirby differently than you might color, say, Williamson.*

GREG: Because of **Williamson**'s line — because of Al's approach, which is fine and delicate and lovely — the coloring should coincide. If you were to color **Al Williamson** with loud, bright, garish, flat comic-book colors, it wouldn't complement the delicacy of the artwork. Ideally, what you want to do is color the work as delicately as he rendered it. What you want is nice off-tones — I would think that with **Williamson** you would color it more pastel, in colors that you wouldn't necessarily want to see in comics. Variations, staying away from principal red-yellow-blue-green-purple. Solid colors — you want to do some variations off those. Whereas with **Kirby**, you're very direct and very to the point — that's

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"I can't honestly tell you Kirby's as

what you want. You wouldn't want to color **Kirby** with delicate light tones.

STEVE: *So you're trying to heighten Jack's expressive qualities, make it more exciting, more intense?*

GREG: That's the way he draws it and I think that's the way it should be colored. I've colored the better part of this book in aniline dyes — Dr. Martin's aniline dyes — which has been the traditional coloring tool for comics as far as I know. However, they traditionally use a very limited palette, because the increments that they print in will only allow 64 colors. But since this thing is using laser separations, it's just full of variations and gradations.

STEVE: *Why did you use Dr. Martin's dyes instead of, say, oil or acrylic paints?*

GREG: Well, Dr. Martin's dyes are incredibly brilliant colors. They're just beautiful. Actually, they were designed well before 1920. And the original use for these aniline dyes was to mark bacteria. They would stain bacteria that normally could not be seen.

STEVE: *They were medical dyes originally?*

GREG: Correct, and they're beautifully vibrant and have subsequently been used by artists. **Jack Davis** works in them almost exclusively. In their pure out-of-the-bottle state, on a white piece of paper, they're almost **neon**, they glow so beautifully.

However, it's about as indelible a dye as you can use, in that if you put a color down, and you want to change that color, you have to apply several coats of acrylics to seal it off. Dr. Martin's dyes, because they're very bright, bleed through everything

STEVE: *Did Jack give you any color notes?*

GREG: No, Jack said, "Whatever you do will be great, I'm sure — I trust you, you'll do a fine job."

STEVE: *That sounds like Jack. How is he?*

GREG: Jack is fine. Let me clear up a misconception. There has been a rumor going around lately that Jack has Alzheimer's Disease. Nothing is farther from the truth. Jack is as sharp and clear as ever. I can't honestly tell you that he's as interested in doing comics as he always was, but Jack is a dinosaur. Jack has been doing comics since 1935 — he did his first strip work in 1935 — so we're talking about 50 years of comics! I mean, if the guy's not as excited about doing comics now as he was then, who can blame him?

I estimate that he's done over 30,000 pages of comic-book artwork, and that's not counting all the writing he did in the interim, or inking his own stuff in the '40s and '50s. So they guy's definitely paid his dues, and if he wants to slow down now that he's 65 or 66, God bless him. I mean, I couldn't demand anything more from Jack than he's given me already, and I think a lot of people have given him a bad rap undeservedly.

STEVE: *Do you think that's because a lot of the newer fans really aren't aware of —*

GREG: I think so, I think so. I can look at it cumulatively and say, "Wow, look at all the work **Jack Kirby**'s done over the last 50 years!" Somebody who's only 16 — I was talking to somebody who said: "Yeah, I like the old stuff, like 2001," whereas to me, the old stuff is THE GUARDIAN and THE NEWSBOY LEGION and CAPTAIN AMERICA. And to this guy, the old stuff was MACHINE MAN and KAMANDI and, you know, DEVIL DINOSAUR and stuff like that.

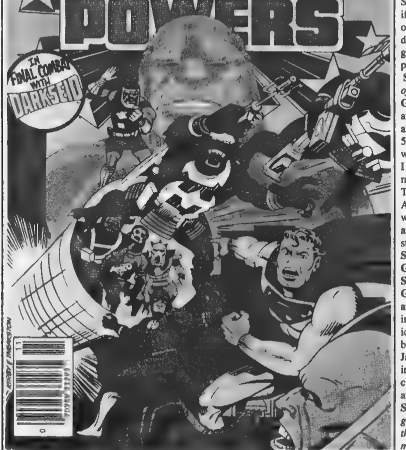
STEVE: *A lot of which isn't all bad.*

GREG: No, of course not.

STEVE: *KAMANDI was very well written.*

GREG: Unfortunately, due to politics up at DC, Jack lost interest in those projects in the final issues, primarily due to politics. In a lot of respects, I think people will be delighted with THE HUNGER DOGS. Jack was interested in finishing the book up, interested in bringing it to a reasonable conclusion, and I don't think it'll disappoint anybody.

STEVE: *Well, let's talk about coloring in general. Are the new coloring methods — things like laser separations — making it more challenging?*



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interested in comics as he always was."

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Inks for a power-packed panel from SUPER POWERS 5 (first series).

GREG: It's just a completely different world! You can do full blends, you can do contour shading. A couple of spots in this book I've knocked out the black line and left strictly color, sort of like a surprint without having to do any of the mechanics. You can have *every* color, with laser seps, whereas you can only have 64 colors with traditional comics seps — a very primitive way to do it.

STEVE: *Comics have been done this way for how many years?*

GREG: All the way back, all the way to the very beginning. As a matter of fact, a historical note now, in the '40s, all the coloring in comics was done at the plant. The publishers never gave them any guides — they would ship off the black-and-white artwork and whoever was printing it would decide what color it was going to be.

STEVE: *That's right — didn't some guy in the factory decide what color Superman's costume was?*

GREG: Captain Marvel. I believe that **Jack Adler** was originally one of those guys and that's how he came into the business. **Jack Adler** — for those who don't know it — colored all of the Silver Age DC covers, beautifully. And those are an inspiration to me. Frequently, I will refer to a **Jack Adler** color composition and use that same balance of colors. In other words, he'll use principally a blue cover with a little purple and a little orange, and a fairly good amount of red. I'll pick up that same combination, which is very pleasing to the eye, and either use it in a panel or in a piece of my own. Because I was reading those books as a child, his work was my very first introduction to color comics. A lot of what I know today is due to his work.

STEVE: *Who are some other colorists who influenced you?*

GREG: People you wouldn't consider colorists, *per se*, as much as artists. **Frazetta** has had a big effect on my coloring — although you don't actually see it, because my preference is to a punchy, commercial, catch-your-eye, make-your-heart-beat-harder look — whereas **Frazetta** has always been a very monochromatic painter who chooses a color, subdues it, and paints around that. You get a lot of graduations of greys and browns and dusty purples, things of that nature. I tend more toward a commercial art of pure tube colors, whereas **Frazetta** subdues his stuff. However, it helped me, in that you can't have *all* color. Something a lot of colorists don't know is that somewhere on a color piece, there must be a place for your eye to rest. Look at **Leroy Neiman's** colors, which are hot, neon, real vibrant. You can't look at a **Leroy Neiman** for long because there's no place for your eye to rest. There's nothing to complement the colors. So even in my most colorful pieces I try to give you something that's an off-variation of a color, just to play against the rich color, the true color. And that's something I've picked up pretty well. **Rockwell** had a very realistic approach to color, which I like, although I don't necessarily think it belongs in comics. It's a more illustrative kind of color, and I use that when I paint.

STEVE: *Are there any similarities between paperback paintings and comics coloring?*

GREG: The advantage to laser separation versus the traditional flat-color method is you can do variations of skin tone. With traditional comics separations you get maybe two, at best — the kind of reddish tone they use for American Indians and the standard flesh color. Well, women's flesh tends to be on the lighter shade than men's flesh. And depending on the coloration of the person, it can go either from a more greenish

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New Age Comics #1, 24 pages. Full-color. Comic book size. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in July. 35 cents. (Canada: 45 cents)

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NEAT STUFF #2!

This issue: Girly Girl and Chucky Boy experiment with a movie camera! Studs Kirby goes on a drunken binge! Junior gets thrown out of the house! In it any wonder this is gaining a reputation as 1985's zaniest new title?

*NOTE: **Neat Stuff** carries a "Recommended for Mature Readers" advisory*

Neat Stuff #2. 32 pages. Magazine size. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in early July. $1.95. (Canada: $2.60.)

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The second volume of this collector's series features well over 100 pages of the best mid-'70s material from STEVE DITKO, co-creator of Spider-Man—including super-hero action with Mr. A, and the entirety of the engrossing philosophical comic "Avenging World"!

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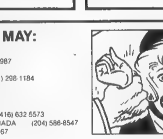

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JOURNEY #22: The Wolf!

This issue features the final showdown with one of Wolverine's nemeses the wolf that has been dogging his tracks for over a year now. Dispatched by a tearful citizenry to kill the wolf that has been terrorizing the landscape, Wolverine and his companions Elmer Alyn Kraft and Mandiress Ross become separated... and that's when the wolf chooses to attack! Read "Wolfhunt" to find out who survives... and don't place any bets!

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Journey #22, 32 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in early July. $2.00. (Canada: $2.70.)

Byrne Hulk, Mr. Monster in AMAZING HEROES #76/#77

AH #76 takes a look at the how and why of one of the season's most intriguing switcheroos: BILL MANTLO/MIKE MIGNOLA and JOHN BYRNE's trading places on *Incredible Hulk* and *Alpha Flight*. All the creators talk to PETER SANDERSON, and Mignola and Byrne collaborate on a special cover! Also in this issue, a Hero History of Eclipso, an article on Robin Hood in the comics, and (delayed from #70) "Checking In" with DENIS KITCHEN.

AH #77 focusses on one of the surprise hits of 1985, *Mr. Monster*: MICHAEL T. GILBERT, creator of the series, talks about his unique approach to humor and horror, and we check in with his collaborators: BILL LOEBS, letterer KEN BRUZENAK, and such one-shot contributors as DAVE STEVENS and ALAN MOORE! The cover is a full-color rendition of *MM* by Gilbert, of course. Plus: The JLA History, and the Top 100!

Both issues also feature reviews, coming comics and of course AH's news section!

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Amazing Heroes #76, 88 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in early July. Note new price: $2.25. (Canada: $3.00).

Amazing Heroes #77, 88 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in late July. $2.25. (Canada: $3.00.)

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?

Two of Fantagraphics Books' most popular series, **Love and Rockets** *and* **Dalgoda**, *will return in August after a skip month (We're giving the creators a few weeks to catch their breath!)* **Dalgoda #7** *introduces an exciting new direction to the lead strip by JAN STRNAD and DENNIS FUJITAKE, and a new comedy/ horror back-up by fan favorite ALAN MOORE and STEVE PARKHOUSE. "The Bojeffries Saga" Meanwhile,* **Love and Rockets #13** *brings back the Mechanics crew of Maggie, Hopey, and Penny for brand new adventures, as well as the continuation of "Heartbreak Soup"!*

Maggie's Adventures Conclude in MECHANICS #3!

With the best advance word-of-mouth of the season, JAIME HERNANDEZ's full-color ***Mechanics*** is set to be a smash! This issue, also entirely colored by the sensational PAUL RIVOCHE, features the concluding installment of "Love and the Rocket" (the *Love and Rockets #2* saga), a long Rena Titamon story from *L&R #3*, and a Rocky-and-Fumble tale from **#5**—all out-of-print, and avidly sought by fans—plus a spectacular new cover and splash. And the coloring... wow!! (Check out the back cover to *Dalgoda #5 or American Flagg! #23* for a sample!)

With all this going for it—*and* three million promotion retail bags on top of it—you *know* this one's going to be a hit!

Plus an introduction by the cast of eldorn, WENDY PINI!

Note: Mechanics *carries the advisory "Recommended for Mature Readers."*

Mechanics #3, 32 pages. Full process color. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in late July. $2.00. (Canada: $2.70.)

Frank Miller in JOURNAL!

FRANK MILLER is on the verge of returning to comics in a big way, with his upcoming *Batman* and *Elektra* projects, and **The Comics Journal #101** catches him at this crucial point of his amazing career—a no-holds-barred interview with one of comics' most controversial and fascinating figures! And Miller provides a cover, too!

This issue also includes an article on "Higher Criticism in Comics" an article illustrated look at the bizarre artwork of the great BASIL WOLVERTON, plus reviews, letters, and more!

You've surely noticed that the ***Journal*** is back on the track with regular monthly publication, more timely news, reviews, and commentary This is a good time to point your readers in the direction of fandom's oldest (and most eagerly followed) regularly published magazine!

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The Comics Journal #101, 100 pages. Published by The Comics Journal, Inc. Shipping in July. $2.95. (Canada: $3.95).

NEMO #14: McManus!

Oops! There's been some shuffling of editorial contents of **NEMO: The Classic Comics Library**! Like so:

#13, as previously announced, will include an overview of the career of cartoonist TAD and a selection of the best *Moon Mullins* Sunday strips, and *Sam's Strip* and more! However, the cover feature is a 30-page *film noir* gangster strip by WILL GOULD! The sexy, violent *Red Barry*! A forgotten classic!

#14 picks up the GEORGE McMANUS Art Deco portfolio (with a stunningly elaborate, full color, never-before-reprinted McManus cover), as well as the exciting *Hairbreadth Harry* strip. Also in this issue, Bhob Stewart on the deranged world of VIP (of *Big George* fame), plus *Major Hoople*, and more of WALKER and DUMAS's *Sam's Strip*!

We're sorry for the confusion, but trust us, *both* issues are among the best ever—with a heavy emphasis on art, focusing especially on adventure strips during the summer.

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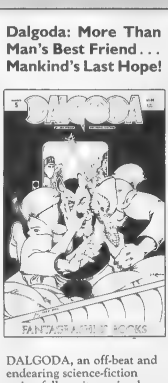

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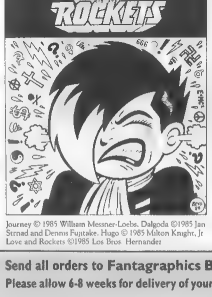

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"You can't look at a Leroy Neiman for long."

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cast — sort of an olive color, that South Americans have — to a very creamy white Irish look. So in THE HUNGER DOGS we've made an attempt to make the flesh tones a little bit different, and we'll be doing that as well on the DC covers. That's something I learned by painting paperbacks, specifically by painting romance paperbacks. For a long time I painted all my skin tones the same color and then realized that everybody's different, and comics wouldn't let you do that, traditionally.

STEVE: *Is it just the methods of color separation that are changing?*

GREG: Well, DC has just instigated a new process of water inks. I believe it's done through a series of screens, I'm not sure. The traditional comics are always printed with oil-base ink. Very frequently in the binding, shipping, and handling of the books, before it was completely dry, that ink would smudge. And because comics are printed so fast, the quality had to be a little lower. As a result, the sharpness of the image with the oil-based ink tended to be a little soft — and, as anybody who's seen the new process can attest, it's razor sharp.

STEVE: *What have they used it on, so far?*

GREG: SPANNER'S GALAXY, among others. It was the first book at DC printed like that. And I guess they've scheduled others gradually until World Color completely gears up to do all their books that way. I think eventually, and to the good of the business, we'll have a better printing quality. Unfortunately, because it so crisp and so sharp, you can see all of the screens that much clearer. I'm hoping they're going to a slightly finer dot pattern, so that you aren't distracted by the very hard pattern of dots below the artwork. In comic books, the artwork can't get any better — well, I've gone out on a limb there. The artwork can't get any better as artwork. Artwork is a hard line medium. The only thing that can get better in comics is the way they're colored, and I think we're about to see a big revolution in comic-book coloring, with this new water-based process, and with the laser separations which are used on the DC graphic novels and the Epic line of comics at Marvel. CRASH RYAN, in the Epic line, was colored with magic markers on blue lines. And because of the nature of the paper, it absorbed the alcohol-based color of the markers differently than it would an aniline dye, and it tended to give a very gritty look to the work.

STEVE: *The colors were sort of muddy. They weren't real bright.*

GREG: Well, I don't know if that was his choice in choosing those colors, or whether it was badly printed, but the artwork itself, being colored with markers, tended to look a little — I won't say blotchy, because that would suggest inconsistency — but it had sort of a grain to it which in the proper spots is excellent. It not only gives you color, but texture in the color. My feeling is that it didn't succeed because it didn't represent the thing it was supposed to be. In other words, the faces looked a little gritty, and faces don't have that texture. If he had gone in and done the rocks, the wood, the concrete, anything else with a modelled surface that way, it would have succeeded. We considered doing HUNGER DOGS in markers, and did some tests, and were very dissatis-

Theakston inks over pencils by Steve Ditko for the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agent known as – NoMan.

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"Anything is better than nothing, which is what they're teaching at Marvel & DC."

fied with the look of it. I think aniline dyes give it the brightest look. You know, people look at comics and *want* color, they *want* some excitement — visual candy, eye candy.

STEVE: *Yet from what you said before, it's not just a matter of splashing bright colors everywhere.*

GREG: It's a lot more than that. We key whole sequences. That is a problem I find in most comic books, that the colorists will jump from color to color to color in the same sequence. **Cory Adams**, who is **Neal Adams'** ex-wife and who was trained by him, knows better. In any comic book she colors, every sequence has its own color. If it's a nighttime sequence, it's blue or purple, and you can clearly see — just from the colors, even if you didn't have the black line artwork there — just from the color combination of the page, you can tell where one scene begins and one ends. And there are a lot of colorists in this business who don't know that. The problem with comics, and especially comic-book coloring, is that nobody teaches it.

STEVE: *Not even at the Joe Kubert School?*

GREG: Well, I won't go that far, because I've never been there. But my feeling is that there's nobody out there teaching color theory. Because there's only a handful of colorists in this business, it really doesn't pay. I mean, there's no comic-book coloring school because there's so few people doing comic-book coloring. Comics is a real untrained kind of medium, and the **Kubert-Buscema** schools are the very first examples of anybody trying to teach actual — well, they aren't the first, but the best, examples of training comic-book people. I just wonder how well they're teaching the students. But, you know, anything is better than nothing, which is essentially what they're teaching them at Marvel and DC.

Nobody says, I'm the Master and you're the student and here's how it's done. If you ask me, coloring's the weakest link in the whole comic-book chain. You can talk all you want about bad pencilling, bad inking, and bad lettering —

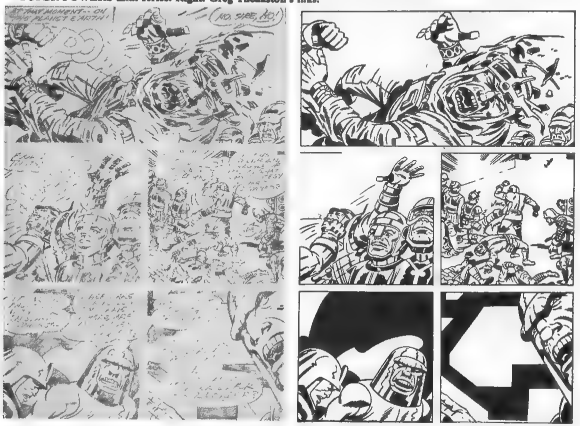
STEVE: *Not to mention bad writing.*

GREG: That you can ignore completely, because you don't necessarily have to read the words. But to read a comic, you have to look at the pictures!

Steranko told me a story once about **Stan Lee** and his colorists. Again, there was nobody out there teaching anybody how to color, so Stan took a mess of comic books and cut them up, pasted them into a big scrap book, and marked DON'T DO. Don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, don't do this. And a lot of it is logic. I mean, you don't color machinery green. Green is an organic color. You color things like vegetation green, and maybe costumes green, but you don't make machines green because machines are metal, and when you think of metal, even though you can paint a machine green, you think of chrome and metallic colors, which tend to be in the blues and purples. Now, a comic book is shorthand for reality. A twisted reality, but it's a shorthand for reality.

STEVE: *Why do you have that copy of BATMAN?* (Gesturing.)

A rare chance to compare pencil art to inks. Left: Jack Kirby's original pencil art for a page from issue five of the first SUPER POWERS mini-series. Right: Greg Theakston's inks.



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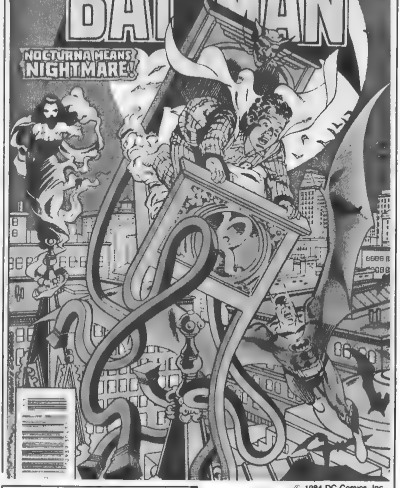
"Stan Lee knew comics. He would never allow some of the stuff going through now."

GREG: It's BATMAN #377. A beautiful cover by **Hannigan** and **Giordano**. I don't know who colored it, but it's got a picture of Robin in a bed — it's a LITTLE NEMO *motif*. The bed's walking away and Batman is flying up in the background, and apparently the bed is stepping over a church. The church is colored orange, and the bed is colored a red orange, and if you take your hand and place it over the figures, you can't tell what the hell's going on. Because the top of this church is orange, and the bed that's walking on top of the church is orange, it's extremely confusing to the eye. And it's this kind of extremely simple mistake that's made frequently. If you take that same cover and put your hand over Batman, his symbolic wing that's flying up in the background is the same tone as the buildings in the background. So, at a distance, if you hold it at about arm's length, there's no difference between the building and the wing, in terms of the tone. And it's pretty much the same color. That's confusing to the eye. And to convey your message, you've got to make it perfectly clear.

That's the whole secret to comic books. The story that you're telling — the thing that you want to convey — must be clear. It's a fast medium. You read it quickly. If you can't quickly understand it, the inclination is to skip on and go to the next thing. Don't even try to figure it out. If you get a consistently badly-colored line of comics, I think you lose readers because of it. Which is why **Kirby** has always been, to me, the archetypical comic-book artist. You never mistake his intent, you never mistake his imagery. What he wants you to know, he gives you.

This gets away from coloring a little bit, but if you want something to look dangerous, you put spikes on it. Visually, you know that a spike will hurt you, and it becomes a dangerous object. Applying that to coloring, you can manipulate the reader without him even knowing it, through the use of color. If there's a big face in the foreground yelling at a fight scene going on in the background, you really don't want the reader to look at this big face in the foreground. And throughout all comic-book history, it's always been colored in a dark tone. You, in effect, throw a single shadow over him — it may be a purple, or a blue, or even a dark green in some situations. But by doing that you not only color the image, you've directed the eye beyond it to another plane. And good comics have dozens of planes.

It's a problem on covers, too. More and more covers tend to have grey on them, but since comics is a color medium, you want the colors on the cover especially to be as bright and as crisp and as cheery as possible, so that somebody walking by the stand is going to stop and pick it up. A lot of DC covers these days have large areas of black. If you look at any of the Silver Age covers, there's almost no black — it's strictly a coloring-book look, with some minimal shadowing just to give you a difference in form. Even at Marvel, I find they're now using large areas of black, large areas of grey, and large areas of a dull, brownish color, or a dull purple. And I don't know whether nobody's thinking, "Hey, this is a color medium, let's have some color," or what. And that was **Stan Lee's** biggest — you can say what you want about Stan, but he knew comics. And he would never allow some of the stuff that's going through now. A good example is — I won't name a name here, but it's a Marvel book that came out recently, and takes place in outer space. There's a space shuttle, some astronauts, and a hero. The hero is grey, the space shuttle is grey, outer space is black, anf the astronauts are dressed in grey. If this was **Stan Lee's** reign, he would have never let that out. He would have insisted that everything be a color. That the hero be a color, or perhaps in this situation that the hero be no color, but the things surrounding him — all of these spacesuits — be some bright color. Instead, the interior of the book is dull, *real* dull! You get flesh tones, grey and black. I don't understand why some of the people do some of the things they do in comics.



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"I like to do things with style. I'm publish-

DAVID SINGER

Going first class could well be Dave Singer's rallying cry, and he certainly strives for that impression. Tall, broad-shouldered and handsome, he is the image of an urbane, successful executive. Of course, things have not always been that way.

When Archie Comics geared up a couple years ago to re-introduce the Red Circle line of super-heroes, Dave was hired as one of the editors. "I was supposed to be E. Nelson Bridwell — it was my function to know every episode published since 1940, the heroes, the villains, the powers, the girlfriends, the name of their dog…be a living library. I had written a whole series of Crusaders Chronicles that would appear on the inside covers, and I'd also done a bunch of scripts that had each of the characters explaining where they'd been all those years. I went on vacation for a bit, and when I came back Archie had dismissed me without my knowledge."

Before that, Singer was managing editor of the short-lived COMIC TIMES. "I didn't own it, I was just one of the founders. And I was probably their most prolific writer. I interviewed Jim Shooter, George Perez, Mike Fleisher, etc., so I got to meet a lot of people and make a lot of friends. And then later, I did a series of articles for AMAZING HEROES — so fans may recognize my name without knowing why, because they've been reading it for years in fanzines."

Speaking of fanzines, Dave was also involved in an ill-fated venture that never got off the ground. "A couple friends of mine, Neil Hansen and Richard Marrizzio, co-created a newsstand magazine for Krause publications, called COMICS COLLECTOR. After issue one, Krause decided to have it done in-house…so I said I'll arrange financing and you do another one. The thing was supposed to be called COMICS SPOTLIGHT." At the last minute, the newsstand contract didn't work out, and the magazine never saw print.

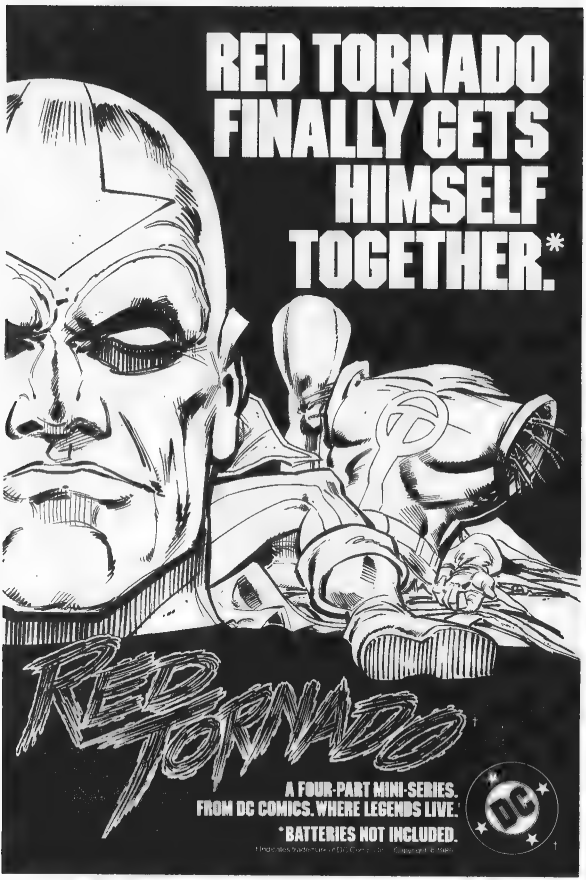
After all these trials and tribulations, Dave has survived to start Deluxe Comics and revive one of the most exciting and well-remembered super groups of the Sixties — WALLY WOOD'S T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. Dismissing threats of legal action by John Carbonaro, who previously revived the characters and claims rights, Singer seems confident that he is on firm footing and is already making plans to branch out and publish other properties.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: David Singer
Born: After World War II
Favorite Comics: T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS and MIGHTY CRUSADERS (1960s version). And any DC comic in which a member of the Justice Society made an appearance.
Favorite Tailor: Elizabeth *(Laughter.)* For Clothes: Bill Blass.
Favorite Restaurant and Cuisine: Harley Street (in New York) and Chinese food.
Favorite Swimming Stroke: Funny you should ask that. I was a lifeguard for a few years. I dreamed of going to the Olympics for a while. It's the butterfly stroke.

ing comic books now. They'll be stylish."

Deluxe Comics' publisher Dave Singer poses with his date, Cheryl Rixon (right) -- PENTHOUSE Pet of the Year, 1979 & 1980 -- and a friend at a St. Patrick's Day party he co-hosted at Club El Morocco in New York.


RED TORNADO FINALLY GETS HIMSELF TOGETHER.*
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FROM DC COMICS. WHERE LEGENDS LIVE.
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"The characters were in the public domain."

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DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *You appeared almost out of the void as far as many people are concerned. What were you doing before you got into comics?*

DAVID SINGER: Before I got into comics professionally, I spent about eight years working in the entertainment field — motion pictures, television, publishing, management, marketing, promotions, public relations. I worked with clients like RKO Pictures, 20th Century-Fox, The American Film Institute, HBO. Because I was in contact with a lot of entertainment figures, I did a number of interviews and feature stories about them for national magizines and newspapers. I began to spend more and more time writing.

DWIGHT: *Then you began writing for comics?*

DAVID: Then I got into comics, right. I've been a comic-book fanatic since I was three years old, and when I was about twelve, I wrote some comic-book scripts and showed them to **Archie Goodwin** who was working at DC at the time.

DWIGHT: *What was Archie's reaction?*

DAVID: Archie was very polite and considerate to me. And I've always thought wonderfully of him for that. There I was, just some kid off the street, and instead of showing me the door, he took time to look at my stuff.

DWIGHT: *When you got into comics professionally, who did you work for?*

DAVID: I approached Archie Comics with a marketing proposal designed to get their comics distributed through church groups and elementary schools. And I worked as their researcher and reference man for their Red Circle line. Unfortunately, both things fell through.

WAITRESS: Are you ready to order?

DWIGHT: *Yes we are.*

DAVID: Could we get some napkins, please?

DWIGHT: *I'd like the shrimp-fried rice.*

DAVID: Shrimp-fried rice. That's it.

DWIGHT: *How did Deluxe Comics come about?*

DAVID: I was feeling very frustrated. I had spent a lot of time and money on a couple of other publishing ventures and had nothing to show for it due to problems with newsstand distributors. I decided I wanted to stay in the publishing field, so I temporarily cut down my company's other activities, which were promotions, marketing and licensing. This time I planned to do something that didn't need a newsstand contract. A newsstand contractor doesn't want to touch you unless you've got a large line of products. And they're not going to take just any new product because there's a limited number of spots on the shelf for all the magazines published. If they're going to bump something, it's going to be you, the new kid on the block. So I decided to do comics in the Direct Sales Market.

Never-before-published George Perez artwork featuring The Raven.

My next decision was what type of comics to do. We did a study and it showed us that there really is no contest. Super-hero comics are what sell.

DWIGHT: *True, but not all super-hero titles sell well.*

DAVID: Right. With that in mind, we considered what kind of characters we wanted to do. At first we thought we'd create new ones. As for how they should be handled, I decided I wanted to go first class, make them very mature, very realistic and exciting.

DWIGHT: *That's a good start.*

DAVID: When it came to the characters themselves, I remembered that when I was a child, my favorite 'heroes were the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. The reason I liked them back then was because they were handled fairly realistically. They were, I think, the first series of books to really make an attempt at depicting true life people. They were not just characters who fought a superbaddy and then went into the closet until the next issue of the series.

DWIGHT: *Yet Tower was not able to make a go of T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS.*

DAVID: Tower went under due to problems on the newsstand distribution scene, not because of sales. The characters went into limbo for many years. Then a gentleman by the name of **John Carbonaro** began publishing them in a black-and-white magazine, two four-color issues co-published with Archie Comics and three reprint color issues of the original Tower stuff. John and I were friends at the time, we're both from New York City, and John and I both knew that the characters were in the public domain because Tower neglected to put copyright, trademark or registeration notices on their comics.

John Carbonaro published the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS for a couple of years. He used mostly fan artists and new artists. The books were not particularly well-received. Sales were low and Archie Comics decided to pull out of the partnership because they weren't making any money on the deal. **Carbonaro** had no funding so his venture went into limbo. About six months later, after his last book had come out, I told him that I wanted to publish the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. The world at large thought that he had exclusive rights

"T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents will kill."

Lightning ala artist Jerry Ordway.

to the characters because he had been putting copyrights and trademarks by JC Productions in his indicia. This he could do, but only in the sense of protecting his interpretations. The characters themselves were public domain.

DWIGHT: *What happened during that talk?*

DAVID: Initially, I offered to "license" the characters from **Carbonaro** — actually, I first asked to buy the rights from him, but he didn't want to sell. So I said, okay, even though I don't have to, I'll license them from you — that way you're getting something from the characters and everyone will think I've got exclusive rights thus protecting my investment as well and it'll make the whole venture a lot easier for me. We had an agreement. I went to work producing my comics.

I originally was going to come out with the first issue in the summer of 1984. But when John saw how successful I was, getting **George Perez, Keith Giffen, Steve Ditko, Dave Cockrum** and others to work for me, he suddenly decided to take back the "rights" and get those artists at the same time. How he was going to get the artists to go with him, I've never figured out. Regardless, he pulled out and started causing trouble. My investors then backed out because they weren't sure what was going on.

DWIGHT: *If you want, we can stop and eat, and get back to this.*

DAVID: If you want to eat, you can. I might as well ramble. I don't like hot food anyway. Don't print that — I'll never get another good meal.

DWIGHT: There has been a fair amount of discussion about the new printing processes and paper for comics, some people not being entirely pleased with this development. What were your reasons for going this expensive format route?

DAVID: Well, I think I answered that in my publishorial in the very first issue of WALLY WOOD'S T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. For the benefit of all your readers who didn't see it, let me say this: I like to do things with style. I went to high school in a suit and tie. And I wore five different suits a week. When I was doing public relations, I'd wear a boutonniere to work every day. When I go to someone's house, I always have a bottle of wine, a house gift, or pastry. It takes an effort to remember to do these things and it costs more money, but I like to have style. Anything I do has to have style. I'm publishing comic books now. They'll be stylish comic books. My goal is to do a comic that a twenty-eight-year-old Wall Street stockbroker can take home on the 6:15 back to Connecticut and proudly read that instead of THE WALL STREET

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"President Nixon threw us a curve."

JOURNAL and have no one look at him and think he's retarded.

My covers all look like paintings. The paper is a quality stock. **George Perez** is doing beautiful covers. Most of our books are colored by airbrushing! Even most Baxter books are not airbrushed. Airbrushing is really the upper, upper tier.

DWIGHT: *When T.H.U.N.D.E.R. first came about, the United Nations had a completely different political make-up than it does now. What's going to happen to the organization now?*

DAVID: The T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents are gong to leave the UN. We felt that from the beginning, we had to do that for a very basic reason. In the 1960s, Red China was not in the UN. And T.H.U.N.D.E.R. often fought agents from Red China. Well, in 1973, **President Nixon** threw us a curve. And Red China soon became a part of the United Nations and comic books have never been the same. So there really is no competition for the UN now, in terms of being a spy network. Who the heck are they spying on?

DWIGHT: *I've got a bunch of rhetorical answers for that.* (Laughter.)

DAVID: In terms of the UN charter, that is. We don't want to have aliens coming in and attacking the world every issue, or dinosaurs being fought or people coming up from the depths of the earth, because all of that is just not realistic. We're trying to create a relatively realistic series about 9-to-5 joes who punch a clock. Our standing joke at the office is that the typical T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agent works a 9-to-5-er, or whatever his shift is, and at three minutes to 5 p.m., he suddenly sees this dinosaur rumbling the street. He looks at his watch, looks at his time-card and says, "Joe will be on in a few minutes. Let him handle it. I'm off-duty and there's no overtime pay left for this year."

DWIGHT: *Well, that creates an obvious conflict. The basic tenet of a super-hero is self-sacrifice for the betterment of society regardless of personal cost. T.H.U.N.D.E.R. sounds a lot more mercenary in that respect.*

DAVID: These characters are not superheroes. That's something we want to make clear. We're doing a super-hero *motif* in having extraordinary powers, costumes and saving the world so that people who read comics solely to see someone punched out will have their gratification. But it is not a super-hero comic. It's a comic about real people whose jobs are saving the world.

DWIGHT: *Okay, but even so, like regular policemen, state troopers, and soldiers, even*

Phoenicia, the rogue T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agent, by John Workman (who was interviewed way back in COMICS INTERVIEW issue 6.

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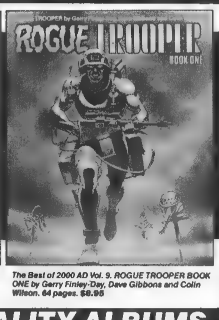

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"Batman carried a gun and shot people. Superman dropped people to their deaths."

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though they have a regular 8-hour shift, they are actually on call twenty-four hours a day in case of emergencies. Will there be a similar thing with T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents?

DAVID: Well, let's put it this way. There are people who work at T.H.U.N.D.E.R. who are really nice people, who enjoy T.H.U.N.D.E.R. because they're idealistic. They're the type who'll look at their watch at three minutes of five o'clock and say, "I don't care what time it is, that's a dinosaur!" And they'll rush off to save the day. Then there are people who are doing it because it's a job and they were fired as steelworkers and they couldn't get another job. Somehow, they got a job with T.H.U.N.D.E.R. These are the people who will say, "It's three minutes of five. I'll help those three minutes. But then I'm leaving and going home." Finally, there are the SOB's at T.H.U.N.D.E.R., who obviously T.H.U.N.D.E.R. doesn't know about, who are double-agents.

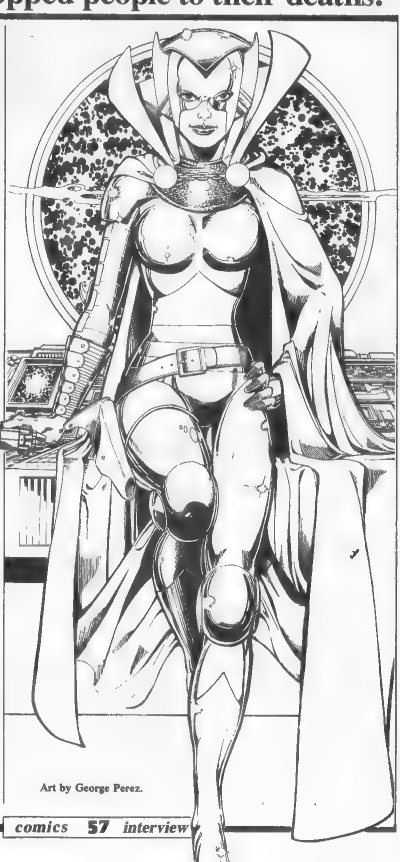
We are talking about a world-wide agency that takes its employees from 150 countries around the world. With tens of thousands of employees around the world — there's got to be some bad eggs in there.

Another thing that makes T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents different is that they will kill. You shoot at them, they're going to shoot back.

And it won't be a warning shot or a shot in the leg. They're going to shoot for the heart. Why? Because you shot at them and they're empowered to shoot back. None of this "I shall not kill" business. None of this "I will take you to prison" stuff.

DWIGHT: *What you've just described is murder.*

DAVID: No, what I've described is — I think it's very wimpish to refuse to take a stand when something is good or bad. I think that giving food to the poor is good. I think that murdering a little five-year-old girl is bad. Someone who gives food to the poor is a good person and a hero, if one wants to give him such an appellation. One who kills a five-year-old girl is a bad person. Why is it that if I kill someone who is about to kill a little girl before he can do it, it's not a heroic action? Comic books, because of the comic-book code, created the concept that super-heroes do nothing that is not wonderful. If you go back to their roots in the '30s and '40s, you'd discover that Batman carried a gun and shot people and Superman dropped people to their deaths from the sky. It was done because there was no code telling them they couldn't do that.



Art by George Perez.

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— Comic Book Scene

"This book should be a *complete sell-out*! Those retailers who have seen an advance copy of *Wally Wood's T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS*™ #1 have sent in re-orders that more than double their original orders!"

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"Keith was writer on LEGION. Levitz was dialoger."

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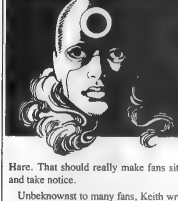
DWIGHT: *You mentioned that George Perez is doing your covers. There are stories floating around that some of the people who worked on issue #1 are no longer doing any more work for you, specifically Steve Englehart and George Perez. What's the story behind this?*

DAVID: I'd love to know. George is under contract, Steve is under contract, **Dann Thomas, Dave Cockrum, Keith Giffen, Steve Ditko, Steve Perry** and all the others are under contract. **Steve Englehart** is in issue **#2**. He is not with us after that. But that's because Steve and I had a conversation. Steve had some things he was going to be doing, and we chose to have a mutual parting of the ways that was very amicable. George is with us for the long haul.

DWIGHT: *What other comics will Deluxe be producing?*

DAVID: Keith has come up with a character that we affectionately call a cross between the **Ambush Bug** and THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: The March



Hare. That should really make fans sit up and take notice.

Unbeknownst to many fans, Keith writes — he just doesn't do the actual dialogue. Essentially he was the writer on the LEGION OF SUPER HEROES run he did with **Paul Levitz** — **Levitz** was the dialoger.

DWIGHT: *Could you explain what you mean?*

DAVID: I think we need some better definitions of writers nowadays because the way of doing comics has changed so much. It used to be that — in what was called the DC style ten years ago, and is now called the full-script style — a writer would write a story that, in addition to having captions and dialogue, would also delineate the panel breakdown, what characters were in each panel, their positions, shadowing, dramatic angles, etc. The artist translated all this into illustrations. Under the Marvel style, the writer creates the plot, which can be anything from one sentence to three or four paragraphs. The artist—

DWIGHT: *Actually plots are longer, an average Marvel plot is about ten pages.*

DAVID: Well, from what I've seen of Marvel comics, a ten-page plot in the Marvel system would be about a 3,000 page story.

DWIGHT: *That's an exaggeration.*

DAVID: Possibly. Although again, chatting with **Roy Thomas** over dinner a few weeks ago, he discussed the fact that there were times when he or **Stan Lee**, when they were writing at Marvel, would call up an artist and say, "I've got a great idea! Spider-Man is standing across the street from a schoolyard, and a rubber ball bounces across the street. He picks it up and goes to throw it back into the schoolyard. He sees a big kid fighting a little kid. And he gets involved in a drug-themed story! Let me see the art in two weeks! Bye!"

DWIGHT: *That doesn't happen anymore.*

DAVID: Well, the point is, that can happen. And occasionally it does. But anyway, now the artist in a sense creates the story. Lights, scenes, dramatic angles, who is off panel, who is on panel. Then the writer sees the pencilled art and writes the dialogue. In some cases, the writer and the artist collaborate on the plot as well, and sometimes the writer isn't even contributing the plot. It gets to a point in a lot of stories where the writer is virtually just a dialogist.

DWIGHT: *Careful, now. You happen to be sitting across from a writer.*

DAVID: Not all writers — I'm just saying under this format. I was a writer, too, in comics for a while. I always worked full script.

Now we have different words for the artists who do just pencils or just inks. Now

we have layouts, breakdowns, finishes. Some artists do more or less work in the pencil stage or in the inking stage and we come up with different words to express how much of a contribution they've made. I think we need a little better breakdown of the writing distinctions. With Keith, he writes his stories. And then he discusses them with the dialogist, so that the dialogist has a feel for where the strip is going to go. Keith then creates the story when he draws it. Then the dialogist puts in the word balloons. This was pretty much the system between him and **Paul Levitz** as I understand it.

WAITRESS: Sir, you finished? Why you no eat?

DWIGHT: *He's been talking.*

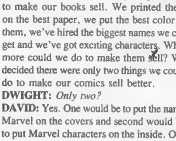
DAVID: I'm eating and talking.

WAITRESS: I'm sorry.

DAVID: It's delicious — I'm just talking too much. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *It's an interview. I'm interviewing him.*

WAITRESS: Oh, I see. *(Turns ashen-faced and fades.)*

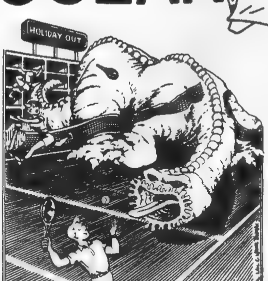


DAVID: We've got a running joke in the office that we've done everything we can to make our books sell. We printed them on the best paper, we put the best color in them, we've hired the biggest names we can get and we've got exciting characters. What more could we do to make them sell? We decided there were only two things we could do to make our comics sell better.

DWIGHT: *Only two?*

DAVID: Yes. One would be to put the name Marvel on the covers and second would be to put Marvel characters on the inside. Our lawyers told us not to try putting the name Marvel on our covers, so we did the next best thing: We went after Marvel characters that were available — **Dave Cockrum**'s FUTURIANS. It was the most successful Marvel Graphic Novel they published. And it is one of the hottest topics of conversation at conventions. All everyone keeps asking Dave at conventions is "When are you going to do a FUTURIANS series? Now we have the answer. Dave's doing a FUTURIANS series in the spring of 1985 for us. It's going to be a bi-monthly, 32-page Baxter

OCEAN COMICS



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Our lead feature in **Ocean Comics #2** is the introduction to **Bob Seppi's** new superhero blockbuster, **Astral-Man**. Bob is a professional comics writer/artist from years past who is returning to comics after a much too long absence.

Among the comic strips and books he's produced are **Davy Crocket, Jr., Thunderbolt,** (and with **Russell Stamm**) **Invisible Scarlet O'Neil** and **Candy**. Younger readers may remember him better as the publisher of the **Magnificent Superheroes of Comics Golden Age** and the **Golden Age Review**.

Whether you're a fan of Bob's work from yesteryear, or you're discovering him for the first time, you won't want to miss this special introductory story from a true comics craftsman.

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Coming in **May, 1985** is the second sensational issue of **Ocean Comics**, the new and exciting anthology series from the innovative comics publisher by the sea.

Featured in this issue is the hilarious **Holiday Out** series by **Michael Vance, Grass Green**, and **Wayne Truman**. Join them for side-splitting laughter as they present **"Haste Makes Paste"**, an uproarious parody of the super-hero comics.

Also featured is part 2 of **Tom Cornicelli's** offbeat gigolo/hero **Lou Dude** in a satirical look at crime and corruption.

This issue also marks the beginning of our conversion to color. In addition to the 28 pages of black and white art, we're happy to announce this issue will feature **4 pages** done **in full color.**

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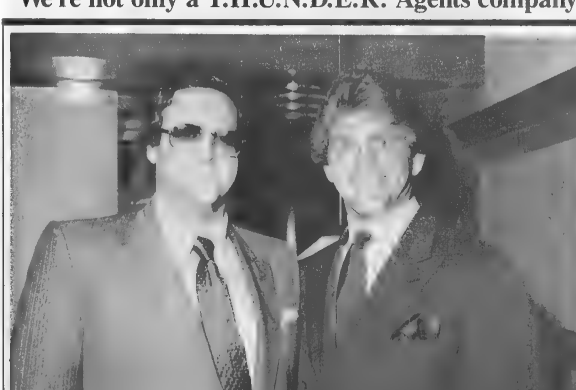
"We're not only a T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents company."



Dave Singer welcomes Washington Redskins quarterback Joe Theisma to a party he co-hosted last summer at Club Touch in Beverly Hills.

comic. Dave will write, pencil and ink it. His wife, **Paty**, will color it. **John Workman** will letter it. Actually, THE FUTURIANS are not exactly Marvel characters. They're owned by **Dave Cockrum**. I should make that clear. We are also doing TALES OF THUNDER!, and a fourth, yet untitled book, by **Keith Giffen**. And we are considering publishing EVANGELINE.

Obviously, being a company that's only had two issues of one title out at the time of this interview, it probably sounds completely preposterous to talk in terms of wanting to catch DC or Marvel. But this isn't an operation by a couple of kids out of a garage. We feel that if the fans like what we're doing, and we're around long enough and given the time to grow, these are reasonable goals.

DWIGHT: *Over all, do you feel you're achieving your company goals?*

DAVID: From an editorial, promotional and marketing standpoint, we are achieving everything. The one thing we are not achieving is the sales we want. If we'd come out a year ago, I think for a lot less effort and money we would have been at 100,000. We published at a time of year that no one could anticipate would be this rough. Everyone in the industry is saying that money is tight, people aren't buying as many posters and T-shirts as they used to, independents are not growing as quickly — you name it. It's just a shame we came in at the wrong time.

DWIGHT: *That's hindsight.*

DAVID: Hindsight's never wrong.

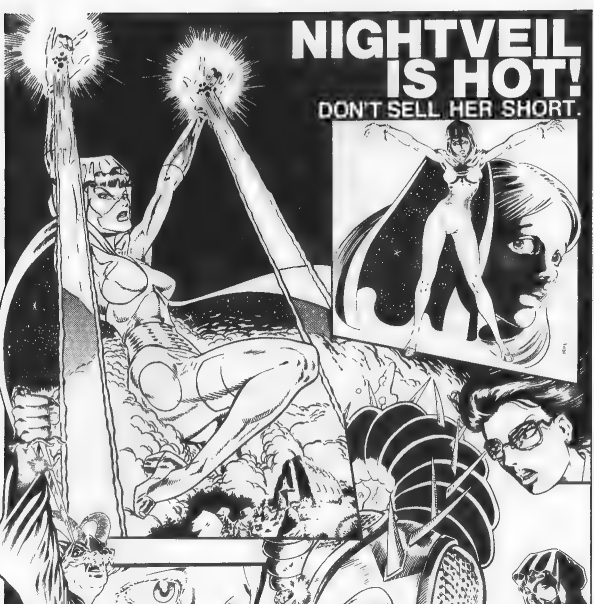
DWIGHT: *That's about the only advantage it has. Okay, are you looking for more properties other than THE FUTURIANS?*

DAVID: We are almost every day having writers and artists call us. **Don McGregor** had a story idea he had done for DC. It had been approved by one DC editor. Then, after Don did all the work getting the project together, another DC editor was assigned to the project and he said, "It doesn't have a gimmick. I want a gimmick." Don doesn't do gimmicks. Don writes messages. Don took his project to us. We bought it.

Roger McKenzie called us up. He said he had heard we were an interesting company and could we use his services? We were thrilled. We had been looking for him for months and months and didn't know how to get his phone number.

We constantly get new material and we review it and let the people who produced it know: (a) we're not interested; (b) we're interested but can't do it at this time; or (c) we're interested and will do it at this time.

The biggest thrill I've had so far was when I got a letter from **Jerry Siegel**, who co-created Superman, asking us if we could use his services. What I loved was the opening in his letter, which said that he was one of the co-creators of the character known as Superman, one of the best-selling characters in comic-book history. He wrote it in such a formal fashion — as if I was some 80-year-old publisher who didn't know that my company published comic books and that I wouldn't know who **Jerry Siegel** was and who Superman was. I had his letter framed over my desk. I just love that letter.



Nightveil
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A young girl named Wendy convinces NIGHTVEIL that her sister has been abducted by demon cult worshippers. In order to save the girl, NIGHTVEIL ventures forth into the realm of man for the first time in 20 years. At the same time,the sorceress and her young charge are followed by a fanatical organization known as The Brotherhood of Purity. They plan to let NIGHTVEIL subdue the cultists then attack her when her powers are drained. However, they did not forsee the emergence of H'ENNGCHOTH, the unspeakable!

written by
STEVE RINGGENBERG

Illustrated by
MARK HEIKE

Inked by
BILL ANDERSON

NIGHTVEIL No.1 SOLD OUT. We were not able to fill re-orders. Don't be caught short again. Order more copies of No.2.

AC COMICS

"We are not an unbiased club."

Jack Bird, Mel DeSart, Folo Watkins, Julie Watkins. Seated: Daniel Weber, Mary Healey, "Fritz" and William Hill

CHAMBANA COMIX CLUB

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Chambana Comix Club (originally Chambana Comics Club)
Born: Fall 1973
Place of Birth: University of Illinois campus — Urbana, Illinois
Founders: Tom Harth, Doug Highsmith, Chuck Huber, Doug Martin, George Sheetz and others.
Reorganization: Early in 1976.
Current Residence: Illinois Student Union, U of I.
Annex: Coslow's Restaurant on campus.
Dues: Members are required to cover their own expenses.
Size of Membership: Roughly 25.
History (as told by Folo Watkins): In the fall of 1973, a group of fans formed a comics club and made an arrangement with the C-U News Agency to get comics and magazines for the same rate as dealers, a week ahead of their appearance on the stands. Folo and Julie Watkins took over the club in early 1976; in 1980, dissatisfied with the cavalier attitude of the News Agency plebes and the inavailability of direct-sales titles, the club took its business to The Book Nook, where the club has been treated well ever since. The club has no structure, no constitution, and sporadically publishes a fanzine.
Function #1: To provide comics fans with a means of meeting other comics fans for discussions on comics and other matters in a friendly — or at least receptive — atmosphere. To that end there are weekly meetings which follow no prescribed pattern.
Function #2: To provide comics fans with a means of acquiring comics as expediently, completely and cheaply as possible. To that end it operates a comics buying service in conjunction with a local dealership.
Function #3: To provide comics fans with a means of keeping up-to-date with all happenings and happenstances in the convoluted universe of comics, essentially by providing comics fans with access to comics they wouldn't otherwise read.
Function #4: To produce and publish a fanzine entitled FANDOMONIUM MONTHLY, which is dedicated to making sport of comics, which has only minimal distribution, and which manages to see print, on the average, bi-annually.

"All that's happening now in main-

Imagine Rod Serling is speaking: The myopic, curly-haired, slightly rain-dampened individual who just entered the cafeteria is Darrel Boatz, a sometime stringer for COMICS INTERVIEW magazine. He has come to this University of Illinois hangout to interview the Chambana Comix Club during one of its weekly meetings. He thinks that he is a welcomed guest tonight, but he will soon discover that this assumption is a strategic and potentially fatal blunder.

The boisterous and hirsute Folo Watkins meets Darrel and leads him to the cluttered table where in short order he shall make the acquaintances of the incognito "Fritz," the occasionally blustering Julie Watkins, the outspoken Mel DeSart, the secretive Jack Bird, the occasionally incautious Daniel Weber, the enchanting Mary Healey and the unflappable William Hill. Under the guidance of their irreverent Unka Folo this portion of what may be comics fandom's most unusual, intellectual, off-beat and altruistic organization has conspired to reduce their visitor to a quivering, shivering, blubbering, insensate shadow of his former self, as you shall shortly see in this little episode from the Comixone entitled "Recommended for Mature Readers"...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mary Healey
Born: 3 June 1961
Occupation: Graduate Student
Club Position: Missionary
Hometown: Olympia Fields, IL

DARREL BOATZ: *I need to make a sound level test. Going around the table, everyone say your name.*
"FRITZ": Fritz!
MARY HEALEY: Mary!
DANIEL WEBER: Dan!
JACK BIRD: Jack!
MEL DE SART: Mel!
FOLO WATKINS: Annette! *(Laughter.)*
JULIE WATKINS: Julie!
DARREL: *Anybody want to say something to start?*
FOLO: Comics are better than ever! *(Laughter.)*
MARY: That's one man's opinion! *(Laughter.)*
DARREL: *When I first discussed doing this interview, I was told that the "x" in the name of the club was important. Why is that?*
FOLO: Because it pissed off the old members. *(Laughter.)* They wanted it to be "comics" with a "cs," but when Julie and I took over we made it an "x" because that's the sort of people we are.
JULIE: They were trying to be pretentious. In one of our earlier incarnations... I'm not sure I said that correctly...
MARY: You said it right but I'm not sure you meant it
JULIE: In any case, we used to be the popular culture club, which was supposed to be interested in movies and novels and comics and so on, and it was all sort of stuffy, basically...
MARY: A Literature Clubbe. *(Laughter.)*
JULIE: Exactly. They centered on the comics being a literature, and that this is good, that the comics are good for this and that. Then we came along and said, "Huh? Hey! Blank! Blank!"
FOLO: "We're being a pretentious bunch of assholes!" *(Laughter.)*
DAN: It's much more fun this way.
JULIE: We're in this for the fun and we're not going to have pretensions. So we adopted the spelling of "Comix."
DARREL: *It doesn't have anything to do with undergrounds?*
FOLO: Oh, a little bit. We're not restricted to above-ground or ground-level or whatever they're called nowadays. *(Enter William Hill.)*
WILLIAM HILL: Greetings. I thought that I would make everyone's holiday by showing up. *(Several jokes at William's expense.)*
FOLO: We in the Comix Club treat *all* of our members with the dignity and respect they deserve.
DAN: Or earn. *(Laughter.)*
MEL: No, if it was earned then we'd be in severe trouble!
DARREL: *Who determines what's deserved?*

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Since 1973, *The Chambana Comix Club* has been purveying culture to the Twin Cities.

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or Coslow's Restaurant

or write
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Urbana, Illinois 61801

stream comics is recycling old ideas"

© 1984 Bob Burden

FOLO: Consensus.
JULIE: General consensus.
DAN: Democracy. Mob rule.
FOLO: Democracy is a vastly overrated notion.
JULIE: I knew you were going to sneak that in. *(Laughter.)*
DARREL: *What is each of you in the club for?*
WILLIAM: Well, I come here because I know I'm treated with respect. *(Laughter.)* Whether it is deserved or not. Also, I can just have a good time, and we get the comics at a cheap price.
DARREL: *Next!*
MARY: I'm in it for the men. *(Laughter.)* I realized that after I joined the club.
DAN: I'm in it for the comics, of course, and also because I unfortunately seem to have something in common with quite a few of the people around here: no taste. Either that or they have something in common with me, which is even more likely.
JACK: Ditto.
MEL: It's just nice to have a Bunch of people all interested in comics so that you have somebody to argue with.
DAN: You get sick of arguing with your parents.
JULIE: I'm in it because I like reading the comics a great deal. Also, the club is a way, especially in the earlier times, where we could make sure we weren't missing anything. We're basically a buying service for a lot of people.
FOLO: Let me tell you a story about the News Agency and the reasons that we went to The Book Nook. A new person started to work over at the News Agency who was told to only send out so many comics, a percentage of the ones they got. So he very carefully went through and trashed *five* complete titles: LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, WARLORD and three others that we never ever saw again.
JULIE: He was supposed to cull the percentage from each title, but he didn't understand this. We brought it up to management and they just went "phht."
FOLO: "That's too bad. We don't make enough money from comics. You don't like it, go somewhere else." So we did!
MEL: And we've been very happy with the decision.
FOLO: There was one old gentleman over there who treated us fine and he got fired! The exact quote: "Mr. Murphy does not work here any longer."
DARREL: *Okay, what topics shall we tackle first?*
MEL: We can't use my topic because it's too tacky and it would get inflammatory.
MARY: Why shouldn't we get inflammatory? We *always* get inflammatory! What is it?

MARS CALLING EARTH. MARS CALLING EARTH. THIS IS THE TOXIC BROADCAST SYSTEM, TRANSMISSION NUMBER 27.
THERE WERE WOLVES AT THE DOOR OF MY CHILDREN TO BE FROM NOW...
A LONG TIME
THE GREEN BONES OF AN UNKNOWN SPECIES DANCED THE GREAT MIDWAY
FRIED BACON HUNG ON THE NEIGHBOR'S CHRISTMAS TREE IN JUNE
THERE WAS LAUGHTER AT THE HOUR OF OUR DOOM...
RIDICULOUS LAUGHTER

FLAMING CARROT: Literature?

MEL: What a twit **Jim Shooter** is. *(Applause.)*
MARY: Where are you going to get any argument on that?
MEL: Probably from **Jim Shooter**, if he happens to read this! *(Laughter.)*
DAN: No one else — including the rest of the staff at Marvel! Let him come here! You'll never see him again!
JULIE: As I said before the interview, we are not an unbiased club. We tend to talk down people who are Marvelites. We try to convince them that there are other things in the universe besides the almighty Marvel.
WILLIAM: JUDGE DREDD!
JULIE: AMERICAN FLAGG is the club's highest-selling title right now. It's outselling X-MEN and SECRET WARS, which are the next up. KITTY AND WOLVERINE may be a little bit higher when you add the copies sold as Marvel mini-series, though.
FOLO: We're the club that took the "Lady Cop" issue of 1ST ISSUE SPECIAL and shredded it, put it in a comics bag and sent it back to DC with a cover letter expressing our distaste. The next week we did it to a WORLD'S FINEST.
DAN: Which **Bob Haney** happened to be writing at the time.
JULIE: We've also written letters about SECRET WARS — wondering where they get all of their *amazing* praise for that when just about every letter of comment that we've read in CBG or COMICS JOURNAL or so on has been negative.
DARREL: *Speaking of letters, somebody was telling me about a letter you sent to THRILLER...*
MEL: Mass letter! Mass letter!
FOLO: We wrote a letter using words of only one syllable so that **Mr. Gold** could understand it, and just to be certain, we included a pocket dictionary. *(Laughter.)*
MEL: And it never did get printed.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Folo Watkins
Born: 9 March 1954
Occupation: Typographer
Club Position: Director
Hometown: Urbana, IL

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"Chris Claremont loves teenage mutants."

JULIE: I liked THRILLER even better than AMERICAN FLAGG — when it was real, that is. The last couple of issues I couldn't even read. Those were bad.

DARREL: *Most people I talked to didn't know what was going on.*

DAN: That was the real attraction! It was a challenge!

JULIE: And it was very, very powerful! I rarely have got a physical reaction to a comic book, but when I read THRILLER I was hyperventilating!

FOLO: It wasn't a pretty picture.

DARREL: *I was going to ask what kind of physical reaction but . . .*

"FRITZ": They put something in the ink that, through skin contact, gets into your system.

JULIE: It was also humorous.

DAN: Yes. If you really read it you got some inside jokes that were rather good. It was one of the true attempts by a comics company to produce literature.

JULIE: *It is!* The first seven issues are literature!

FOLO: An above-ground comix company.

DARREL: *You don't think that comics are literature?*

MEL: Not from Marvel.

JULIE: They're soap operas.

DARREL: *Why isn't that literature?*

MEL: It's bad literature.

WILLIAM: Well, I don't know — I think comics sometimes reflect the times and troubles the world is going through. There are times when the comics have tried to make a relevant statement.

MARY: Not lately.

FOLO: And that was only made to try to sell more copies. When the copies weren't sold, it was back to rockets and rayguns.

WILLIAM: True. But I still feel that comics reflect the times.

JULIE: They reflect the fads, and it usually takes them about two years. Now that break dancing is going out we've got Vibe.

FOLO: Let's hear it for originality.

JULIE: Vibe is one of the new four-letter words.

DARREL: *Do you have any contact with other clubs?*

FOLO: As you know, COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE has been running the little listing telling what people collect and how to contact the clubs. We have had a few people come in and ask if we had any back issues for sale. When we tell them no, that we only have current stuff, they walk off. There was one club from California, twelve die-hard people that had just started and were all Marvelites, but some of them read other things like DC and THE SPIRIT, who wrote asking us to become involved in an active dialogue between the comics clubs.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Daniel Weber
Born: 6 August 1960
Occupation: Computer Programming Supervisor
Club Position: Lech
Hometown: Urbana, IL

MARY: That's *very* Californian.

DAN: And we ignored them completely. *(Laughter.)*

FOLO: There is a also Champaign-Urbana Comix Club. They spell their name with an "x" because we do, I suppose, but they spell out "Champaign-Urbana" because they figure we don't know how. Several of them were members of this club, which is centered around the University of Illinois campus, and apparently they didn't like the troubles of getting onto campus and interacting with older, malicious people.

JULIE: Especially malicious against Marvelites.

DARREL: *You hate Marvel, it seems?*

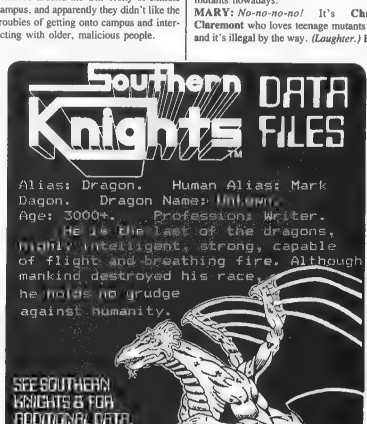
DAN: Marvel hasn't put out much good since **Jim Shooter** took over. Occasionally, they put out something good — but not often.

MEL: I'll admit I get some Marvel titles. They were reasonable when I started and I'm a die-hard fan. I've got this stupid hope that they might actually improve, but I doubt it.

JULIE: There are some Marvels that I read and enjoy: DREADSTAR is pretty good. I usually like DOCTOR STRANGE — it's usually interesting to read though it's varied. I still read X-MEN because I'm interested in the characters, and I don't think they've ever yet gotten out of character — but most of the plots they've been in are silly. I'm addicted to the characters, *not* to any of their plots.

FOLO: Everyone seems to love teenage mutants nowadays.

MARY: *No-no-no-no!* It's **Chris Claremont** who loves teenage mutants — and it's illegal by the way. *(Laughter.)* But


Southern Knights™
DATA FILES
Alias: Dragon. Human Alias: Mark Dagon. Dragon Name: Unknown.
Age: 3000+. Profession: Writer.
He is the last of the dragons, highly intelligent, strong, capable of flight and breathing fire. Although mankind destroyed his race, he holds no grudge against humanity.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

"Kirby doesn't even seem to care."

he is the one who's so enamored of it, and he's not being controlled by the editorial staff.

FOLO: But if you look at the top-selling titles you've got SECRET WARS, you've got X-MEN, you've got . . .

JACK: TEEN TITANS.

DAN: FANTASTIC FOUR.

FOLO: KITTY AND WOLVERINE.

DAN: NEW MUTANTS.

FOLO: All of them with teenage mutants!

DARREL: *But what about G.I. JOE?*

DAN: Nobody here reads *that! (Laughter.)*

FOLO: G.I. JOE is read by teenage mutants.

"FRITZ": On behalf of teenage mutants, I resent that remark.

DAN: In a lot of cases regular sales figures do not come close to reflecting the tastes of the club.

FOLO: For example, virtually everyone here gets SECRET WARS. We don't *read* it!

JULIE: I have not read one word!

DARREL: *Why do you buy it then?*

FOLO: We ask ourselves that often, and it comes down that the final answer is — stupidity. The fan is an animal that is possessed of a certain native instunct that forces him to take a look at something, and once he's got the first issue he's got to go ahead and get them all. Ask Mel.

JULIE: He's *still* getting DAZZLER! We are not going to be getting SECRET WARS II, however. We have a moral conviction.

FOLO: We took the pledge.

JULIE: I finally dropped CONAN (which I picked up from issue #17) and KING CONAN, to go over to BATMAN and DETECTIVE.

FOLO: Back when **Roy Thomas** and **Barry Windsor-Smith** were doing CONAN it was good. It has rapidly gone downhill ever since. Right now, as I believe **Cat Yronwode** said, it's the nadir of everything that a good comic is.

MEL: Shooter's turning out garbage with SECRET WARS. . .

DARREL: *But it's selling.*

MEL: It is *still garbage!* In the Sixties **Shooter** wrote the same as everyone else. Writing progressed to the Eighties, Jim didn't!

MARY: He became an editor.

MEL: He became an editor, and he edits in the Eighties like he writes in the Eighties, which is all bad!

WILLIAM: Well, some things have gone down but some have gone up.

JULIE: Name one.

"FRITZ": NEW MUTANTS, since **Bill Sienkiewicz** started.

JULIE: The art may be better but the plot isn't.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Julie Watkins
Born: 5 November 1953
Occupation: Library Technical Assistant
Club Position: Treasurer
Hometown: Urbana, IL

"FRITZ": But I can at least *read* it now! I can at least read the book now that I've got art that I can at least look at!

DAN: I agree with Fritz on that. I was rapidly losing interest in NEW MUTANTS until **Sienkiewicz** took over. His art draws you to it enough to get you to read it.

DARREL: *A lot of people have expressed the opposite opinion — that the art has turned them away from it.*

DAN: Sienkiewicz' art is very stylized. The kids are looking for conformity and characters that look human.

FOLO: I think that's an over-simplification. When I was a kit I loved **Mike Sekowsky** with the big honkers! *(Gestures towards nose.)*

DARREL: *Personally, I always got into Wayne Boring.*

FOLO: Oh, I loved **Boring**'s art!

DARREL: *But it doesn't really look human.*

MEL: Let's not forget **Jack Kirby** now.

DAN: Let's try to.

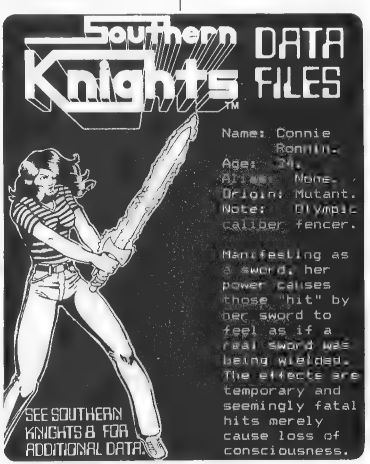
DARREL: *What's wrong with Kirby?*

DAN: Arthritis, I assume.

JULIE: He can't draw anymore He's got square fingers and all of his inkers follow all of his pencils to fastidiously.

FOLO: Earlier, **Kirby** had inkers like **Joe Sinnott** who would not follow every pencil mark. But now he's got these awestruck people like **D. Bruce Berry** and **Mike Royer** and you can see every little pencil line. That's been a great detriment to **Kirby**'s reputation.

DAN: The thing is, **Kirby** doesn't even seem to care — he keeps using these same inkers over and over.


Southern Knights™
DATA FILES
Name: Connie Ronnin.
Age: 24.
Alias: None.
Origin: Mutant.
Note: Olympic caliber fencer.
Manifesting as a sword, her power causes those "hit" by her sword to feel as if a real sword was being wielded. The effects are temporary and seemingly fatal hits merely cause loss of consciousness.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA

"FLAMING CARROT is more literature than comics."

FOLO: He likes his writing too, what can I say? *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: On the other hand, you get people like **George Perez**. There was this one issue of TEEN TITANS where he had Dick Grayson — not Robin, but Dick Grayson in a disguise which included a blond wig and a moustache, and you could still tell it was Dick under it all. He's a magnificent artist.

DARREL: *What are your favorite alternative publishers?*

JULIE, FOLO, MEL, DAN: First "**FRITZ**": Aardvark-Vanaheim.

WILLIAM: Eagle. They put out JUDGE DREDD. There's nothing wrong with that man

FOLO: Judge Dredd is William's idea of a conservative figure.

"FRITZ": A few days ago, I heard Deni's stealing Aardvark-Vanaheim from under the feet of my pal Dave, leaving him nothing but the fuzzy gray aardvark. The company wouldn't be there if it wasn't for **Dave Sim.** It's an emotional thing with me...

FOLO: Fritz is unhappy because Dave refused to take him as part of the divorce settlement.

MARY: Well, I would assume the artists were the ones who made the decision to go with **Deni.**

DAN: Dave is getting to be such a sleaze lately he probably couldn't run a company if his life depended on it.

FOLO: I think I hear the need to edit this a little. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: That's sleaze in a...

FOLO: ...positive sense. Sleaze doesn't always have to be down-lifting.

DAN: Sleaze in a physical sense, not in a mental one.

MARY: He's unkempt, is that what you're trying to say?

DAN: The man looks like he's been sleeping under a table for a week. That's on a good day!

FOLO: You've only seen him at a convention; he probably had been.

"FRITZ": For the most part of his doing CEREBUS, he looked that way. It was only for about a year in the middle of it that he had the clean-cut, clean-shaven, shorthair look

DAN: The unkempt appearance does not bring out trust in people who are expecting a paycheck now and then.

FOLO: Mort **Weisinger** never looked like that.

MEL: Julie **Schwartz** never looked like that.

DARREL: *Could you tell me how the club operates?*

FOLO: Under the table.

DARREL: *We haven't talked much about the club...*

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by FOLO WATKINS and BUMPS

Humor in a costumed vein — from the Club's fanzine, issue 5.

FOLO: The club operates as loosely as it can. If we wanted to have a constitution and a charter and elect presidents and such like that we could have a club just like any other. But we're here hopefully to have some fun, to read the comics, and to make fun of what everybody else likes.

DAN: And avoid paying taxes.

FOLO: If you take a look at FANDOMONIUM MONTHLY, volume one, issue five, in its tenth great year, you'll see a lot of what the club is about. We make fun of everything we dislike and a lot of the things that we do like.

MARY: Especially the things we do like.

DARREL: *How do you tell the difference?*

MARY: Well, it's easier to make fun of the things you do like because you know them so well. If you don't like it you tend to avoid it, at least I've noticed that in most people.

JULIE: Yeah. I haven't read a word of SECRET WARS!

FOLO: I tried to trick her once, but she got wise.

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Dubuque, IA

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"AMERICAN FLAGG was conceived as satire."

FOLO: But getting back to what the club does — we have weekly meetings. Beforehand I go out and pick up the comics that have been ordered through the club's buying service. I bring them out to wherever we're having the meeting, generally in the Student Union at the U of I, or at Coslow's Restaurant, where the elite meet to eat. We separate the comics out and people come and pick up their orders. During the meetings people usually take the opportunity to read the comics they don't themselves get. In that sense, you know, if you go down to one of the comics shops in town the mean ol' owner'll be standing there with a shotgun, pointing out the sign that reads, "No Reading, Buy It and Leave." But here in the club you can always grab someone else's while they're busy with someone else's.

MARY: Watch it!

JULIE: One thing that I did was when AMERICAN FLAGG came out I saved back four copies of each issue. It was during the summer when our numbers are down because a lot of our people are students who leave for the Summer. When people came back we told them about AMERICAN FLAGG and unloaded the extra copies at cost very quickly. We *push* the titles we think are good. More people find out about them that way and will get started.

FOLO: Sort of a public service, you know — making certain that *our* titles continue to be published.

DARREL: *Who can join?*

MARY: We'll take just about anybody.

WILLIAM: They let me in.

JULIE: Except for people who come into a meeting with water pistols.

FOLO: Let's not talk about him. He takes too much pride in being the only person ever thrown out of the club.

JULIE: Distribution can be kind of funny. Normally, I always encourage people whenever something new comes out to check it out. I'll be asking that week and the week after who wants to add it, that kind of thing. And if anybody wants to cancel DAZZLER I don't give them any problems. Or CONAN or SECRET WARS. I was encouraging people to drop SECRET WARS because I wanted it to drop below the number of people getting AMERICAN FLAGG. I was rejoicing when it happened.

FOLO: You might think the members of the club have only one interest, that being comics. In actuality, the members are all varied...

MEL: I'm not. *(Holds up a Green Lantern toy.)*

FOLO: Except for Mel.

DARREL: *What are your favorite comics?*

FOLO: Woody Allen.

MARY: Joan Rivers.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jack Bird
Born: 28 February 1960
Occupation: Student
Club Position: Low Life
Hometown: Princeton, IL

"FRITZ": Grow up, will you.

MEL: Richard Pryor.

"FRITZ": My favorite comic, I would have to say, is CEREBUS, even though I suppose at the moment I look forward more to NEW MUTANTS than anything else.

WILLIAM: JUDGE DREDD. He's okay in my book. That dude is law-and-order.

MARY: GRIMJACK is probably my favorite.

DAN: Either DREADSTAR or GRIMJACK. It's a tie.

JACK: From the club I've recently gotten into BATMAN and DETECTIVE, which are interesting. I'd never picked them up before.

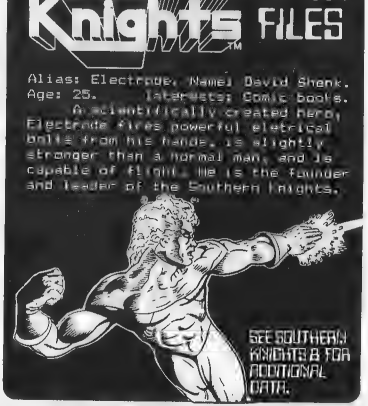
MEL: I'm going out on a limb here, AZTEC ACE. **Doug Moench** strikes again. BATMAN and DETECTIVE are both good and AZTEC ACE is just absolutely super. **Moench** isn't restricted by the Code so he can do a lot more things in AZTEC ACE.

FOLO: Since THRILLER died its premature death — premature *before* it was cancelled by the way — it would have to be AMERICAN FLAGG. It's just wonderful.

JULIE: I like THRILLER, the first seven issues, and then it's AMERICAN FLAGG. I also like TEEN TITANS and BATMAN and DETECTIVE as my favorites.

FOLO: Of course, my single most favorite issue of the past year has to be TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #50. It was soooo good, and it had no fights, no costumes, no super-villains — I was amazed!

JULIE: My favorite single issue lately was SWAMP THING #32, the POGO pastiche. That was beautiful. I read it aloud after I read it the first time silently and it was *much* better when read aloud. I had this little eight-


Southern Knights™
DATA FILES
Alias: Electrode. Name: David Shenk.
Age: 25. Interests: Comic books.
A scientifically created hero, Electrode fires powerful electrical bolts from his hands, is slightly stronger than a normal man, and is capable of flight. He is the founder and leader of the Southern Knights.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

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"The writers at Marvel are very self-indulgent."

year-old kid standing next to me who thought I was reading one of those exciting comics, he kept looking over my shoulder. I finished with this sad note in my voice, "Oh, that was so sad," and he'd been asking me all the time when were they going to start fighting. He just *stared* at me.

MEL: SWAMP THING #33 really touched me. I don't know why, but the whole idea of Swamp Thing and Abby walking through the swamps holding hands, that really touched me, and I like that.

WILLIAM: I also enjoy WARLOCK.

DAN: But that's one of the older...

WILLIAM: No, I mean from Eagle. NEMESIS THE WARLOCK.

DARREL: *Which comics currently being published do you think are literature? And, since you made the distinction, which comics do you think don't deserve to be called literature?*

MARY: Which comics don't deserve to be called comics? Some of them are that bad.

FOLO: To me, JOURNEY is literature. THRILLER...

JULIE: When it was still real.

FOLO: When **Trevor Von Eeden** and the guy with three first names, **Robert Loren Fleming**, were doing it, it was literature. AMERICAN FLAGG is *pulp* literature, but I think that's what **Mr. Chaykin** is trying for.

MEL: Mr. Chaykin?

"FRITZ": Not Howie?

JULIE: SWAMP THING is a sort of strange one, but I think it's going towards literature.

FOLO: Should we tell you how Julie humiliated **Howard Chaykin**?

JULIE: It wasn't meant to be a humiliating question!

"FRITZ": All of these professionals are going to be reading the magazine — they'll know where to *find* us now! "So, *that's* who did that to me!" *(Laughter.)*

JULIE: One of the questions that I asked him was when he was putting all his background together for AMERICAN FLAGG had he planned it all out from the start — or did he come up with jokes and figure out ways of making the background fit, so he could tell all these jokes. I meant it as a compliment!

FOLO: Mike Gold didn't take it as a compliment.

JULIE: AMERICAN FLAGG was originally conceived as a humorous satire. I thought it was a compliment.

FOLO: I'm certain that CEREBUS is literature. I think that FLAMING CARROT is more literature than it is comics. As far as what is sub-literate — all of the Archie comics. All the Archie super-hero titles are sub-literate.

DARK KONT
MINUTE MYSTERIES
BY A ZOROASTER HISDOM
HELLO, SMERNOW! THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE HERE! THERE'S BEEN--
A MURDER, INSPECTOR HENDERSON?
...UH, YES. HE'S BEHIND THE--
OH, YOU FOUND HIM. HE'S BEEN--
--POISONED! BITTER ALMOND ON HIS LIPS! CYANIDE, I'D SAY!
TH-THANKS BUT WE CAN HANDLE--
I'LL CHECK EVERY LAB IN AMERICA TO SEE WHO SELLS THIS BRAND!
BUT... BUT... BUT...
THEN I'LL CROSS-CHECK THAT DATA WITH EVERY BILL EVER SENT ANYWHERE! I'LL BE--
--BACK! HE WAS IN A 747 OVER THE NORTH POLE BUT I--
INSPECTOR? THE DOOR'S OVER HERE!
READERS! DO YOU KNOW HOW OUR HERO FOUND THE CULPRIT?
I USED MY MICROSCOPIC VISION TO DETECT THE POISON UNDER MY TOTAL RECALL TO MEMORIZE HIS FINGERNAILS! THEN I USED THE LAW SO I COULD PROSECUTE HIM!
THANK THE COMICS CODE THAT I HAVE A CODE AGAINST KILLING OR I'D FRY HIM WITH MY HEAT-VISION (HOWEVER I DID QUICK THE SCAROLD AT SUPER-SPEED)!

More Chambana Comix Club humor in a costumed vein.

JULIE: A lot of the titles with the X-MEN things, you know, are just extended soap operas. It doesn't have a beginning, a middle, an end — it just goes on and on and on.

MARY: It doesn't have any consistency either. I was talking to Dan about this before — I really get the feeling that the artists and the writers at Marvel are very, very self-indulgent, and the editors don't have the authority to tell them to cut it out. They know when push comes to shove it's the editors who'll lose the jobs, not the writers or artists. The editors are in the position where they're *supposed* to be keeping an eye on everything and making sure everything has its consistency, but when they try to make the writer or artist change something that's wrong they have no way of enforcing it, and the writer or artist will just tell them no, that that's the way he wants it. So you get people like **Chris Claremont** being *very* self-indulgent, being *very* inconsistent, and there's nobody there who can sit him down and make him do it right. There's nobody with the power to say, "You can't do that. It might be a great idea and hysterically funny or whatever, but you *can't* do that because five issues ago you did this and this, and it's contradictory."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: William Hill
Born: 28 April 1954
Occupation: Pizza Delivery Man
Club Position: Devil's Advocate
Hometown: Champaign, IL

"When they were doing X-MEN, Byrne and Claremont

FOLO: At the Chicago Comicon several years ago, when **Claremont** and **Byrne** were still doing X-MEN, they had an X-MEN panel with **Byrne** on one end of the table and **Claremont** on the other. **Claremont** would say something and **Byrne** would contradict him. Then **Byrne** would say something and **Claremont** would contradict him. It was hilarious.

JULIE: I think the times when they were doing X-MEN were very, very good because they had to satisfy each other. When they split up, their controls were gone. **Byrne** can be very good when he's sat on, when he is backed into a corner with no escape. When that happens he'll find a way out, and it'll usually be fantastic. He can make something out of whole cloth, but left to his own devices he becomes trivial.

FOLO: It appears to be a big difficulty. The editors do not influence the talent, as it were, as they should. That's been what's the matter with a lot **Jack Kirby**'s titles in the last ten years. That's what's the matter with **John Byrne**'s titles. God knows that's what's the matter with **Jim Shooter**'s titles!

JULIE: I like a good plot where something is actually happening, where the characters are developing. I usually skim through fight scenes.

VITAL STATISTICS

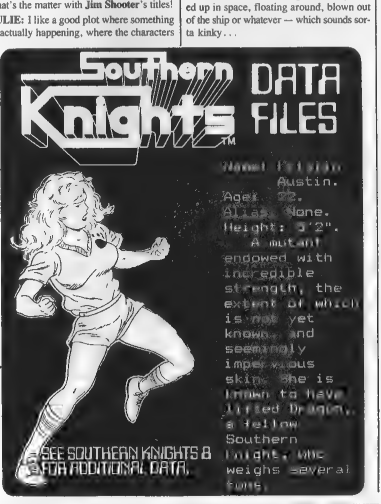
Name: "Fritz" (real name withheld)
Born: 31 December 1964
Occupation: Student
Club Position: Parliamentarian
Hometown: Champaign, IL

DARREL: *So, your complaint about soap operas isn't about characterization, just the continuum?*

JULIE: There is a tendency in comics to take the idea of serialization as far as possible, with cliffhanger endings, and you find out next month that . . .

"FRITZ": No! Cyclops isn't really dead!

JULIE: Oh, you're going to start me on X-MEN. There was one thing where they ended up in space, floating around, blown out of the ship or whatever — which sounds sorta kinky . . .


Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Austin.
Age: 22.
Alias: None.
Height: 5'2".
A mutant endowed with incredible strength, the extent of which is not yet known, and seemingly impervious skin. She is known to have killed Dragun, a fellow Southern Knights' villain who weighs several tons.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 8 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

FOLO: You have be mature to be in the club.

JULIE: So, they're floating around in space and in the next issue, in the first scene they're back inside the ship, and it turns out somehow that they never did leave it. I guess nobody could figure out a good way of getting them back in the ship after they left it, so they abrogated the previous issue, which irritated me no end. You get the feeling that the writer is being lazy and has very little consideration for the people who are actually reading the book, has more consideration for what seems funny to him at the time, what seems like a good idea to him at the time. "Oh, this'll be great, this'll be wonderful, we'll put this in here and send it out." They don't really care what anybody else thinks about it, even the readers, they just go ahead and do it. We're the ones paying for it, in more ways than one.

FOLO: *Yeah! (Applause.)*

MEL: I very much appreciate many of the direct sales titles because they're directed at an older audience. Like we mentioned before, they're more like literature. **Doug Moench** is writing a story — he's not just taking a series of fights and filling in words around them. **Howie Chaykin** is writing wonderful satire in AMERICAN FLAGG. AMERICAN FLAGG has, compared to most mainstream titles, very few knockdown-dragout type fights. I would look for the more intelligently written books, the more sophisticated stories in the alternate press titles. I have more hope for those companies than in mainstream titles.

FOLO: But you have to admit that DC has the archetypical characters in most cases. They have the ones that everyone else makes imitations of.

"FRITZ": Superman *is* the super-powered character that everyone else stems off of.

FOLO: Batman is the archetypical costumed crimefighter.

MEL: But Aztec Ace doesn't stem off of anybody. One of the nice things about the alternative titles is they'll branch out and not do the rip-offs of the archetypical characters. There has never been a character quite like Ace.

FOLO: Unless you talk to **Don Thompson**.

MEL: Well, I don't agree with Don. There's never been a character like **Chaykin**'s Flagg either.

DAN: Not in comics.

MEL: That's what I mean. You're bringing in a whole new . . .

FOLO: . . . set of cliches.

MEL: In a way, yes; but at least they're new cliches. All that's been happening in mainstream comics, for the most part, for years, is just recycling old ideas and putting different costumes on 'em!

would contradict each other. It was hilarious."

JACK: What I'd like to see more of in comics is stuff like what's being done in POWER PACK. The characters are being treated like real people. When I read NEW MUTANTS I can't identify with it. They are supposed to be teenagers but they act like adults. In POWER PACK the characters are little kids, but they act like little kids. I'd like to see the characters acting like what they're supposed to be, instead of having teenagers acting like they've got full maturity. I like AMERICAN FLAGG and NEXUS and the like, they deal more on the humanistic level.

DAN: I guess a lot of it comes down to realism, to a degree. These are comics and in a lot of ways you're not going to get anything too realistic, because that won't necessarily sell. But, your comics have set up their universes, if you will, and you want the writers and the artists to stay within those boundaries.

MARY: Consistency is vitally important.

DAN: One of the things that I like about reading these comics, though, is the unexpected, the ability to be surprised . . .

FOLO: And the ability to get pissed off at some writer or some artist.

WILLIAM: When it comes to comics I kinda like things where the story is told by the artists. Instead of having all these balloons everywhere, whole pages of balloons where you have what the character is thinking and why — I like something uncluttered. I like something with a definite beginning and a definite end, and a little bit of violence mixed in — like EVANGELINE.

FOLO: Oh, you mean something that's been cancelled because they can't keep it up.

WILLIAM: You know, you read the story by looking at what the artist drew and putting in the story yourself

DARREL: *You know, that's the argument Dr. Wertham used against comics: that you didn't actually have to read them.*

FOLO: Well, as we might point out in the case of William, **Dr. Wertham** was not incorrect all of the time. *(Laughter.)*

WILLIAM: I don't like it when writers throw in a lot of their ideas on what the character is *supposed* to be thinking and so on, why they're *supposed* to be doing something, that he's doing this because of such and such and blah blah blah . . .

FOLO: Because **Elliot Maggin** figures that he's writing for twelve-year-olds.

WILLIAM: Right.

DARREL: *But what's wrong with writers writing?*

WILLIAM: Writers are good for direction, but you read a lot of comics and there's a ten-minute speech every page.

FOLO: The whole idea of the medium is a combination of the visual and the literal.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mel DeSart
Born: 21 May 1958
Occupation: Library Technical Assistant
Club Position: President
Hometown: Champaign, IL

WILLIAM: Yeah, but sometimes they get much too wordy. I enjoy reading the comics, but I don't enjoy having to study them. Let's get rid of . . .

FOLO: . . . the stuff in the balloons. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *About the only thing I never liked reading in a comic was "Chuck Tain is Bouncing Boy's real name," which was in every issue.*

WILLIAM: How about every time they have S.H.I.E.L.D. and they tell you what it means.

JULIE: Or "for more information see SECRET WARS #8."

WILLIAM: Or issues where every page it says "see last issue."

DARREL: *Well, it's time to pack up. Anybody want to say anything?*

FOLO: What would you like us to say that **Mr. Kraft** would put in his magazine?

WILLIAM: Who is **Mr. Kraft** anyway? *(Laughter.)*

FOLO: **David Anthony Kraft** is the guy who wrote TARZAN for Marvel and managed to throw in everything but the kitchen sink.

DAN: He also wrote DEFENDERS.

FOLO: I'd like to say I think **David Kraft** is a wonderful human being.

DAN: Folo, I'm not wearing boots. *(Laughter.)*

FOLO: And **Mr. Shooter** shouldn't really come sue us!

DAN: No! He should some see us!

MARY: We'll show him a real good time! *(Laughter.)*

The club's "officials": President Mel DeSart, Director Folo Watkins, Treasurer Julie Watkins. Here, a stuffed animal is being forced to read GRIMJACK in the hopes that he will not end up becoming a Marvelite.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

70-YEAR-OLD CREATOR OF SUPERMAN THINKS COMICS INTERVIEW IS SUPER!

Dear David:

Thanks again for sending me your fascinating and extremely interesting magazine, which I enjoy reading. Such revelations! Such revealing peeks into the comics-creating process! Writers, working in their lonely little room, are always interested in learning how other writers (and artists) manage to do their very best work. COMICS INTERVIEW is always interesting and sends me charging back to the typewriter, all-fired-up. Since I'm 70 years old that's quite a compliment to COMICS INTERVIEW. What an upper!

Jerry Siegel
Los Angeles, CA

Coming from the co-creator of Superman, that's a high compliment, indeed! Here's to another seventy super years, Jerry!

— DAK

THE JOHN VERPOORTEN STORY

Dear Dave (and Company),

I was particularly interested in the **Orz** interview. I'm enjoying the interviews with the production (letterers and colorists) people the most.

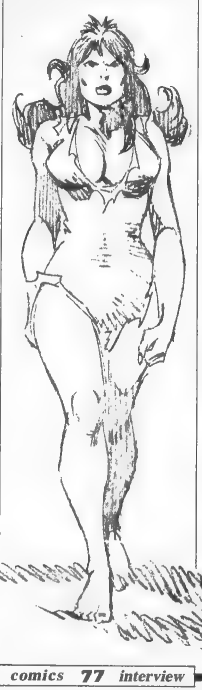
While I read the **Doug Moench** piece, I was struck by the thought that the COMICS INTERVIEW could almost be subtitled "The **John Verpoorten** Story." I'll wager he's been mentioned in every issue of CI that's been published! He must have been a great guy. Everyone sure loved him.

Larry Marder
7060 N. Sheridan
Chicago, IL 60626

NOTHING PERSONAL AGAINST SHE-HULK

Dear DAK,

I must say that you're being a really good sport about this whole anti-She-Hulk thing.



Pencils by Mike Vosburg, from SHE- HULK Issue 25.

© 1985 MCS

I want to thank you for turning so much space in your letters pages over to my tirades against the Green Woman.

In fact, for all the free publicity you've given us, we, the members of the Committee to get the She-Hulk out of the Fantastic Four (and out of the Marvel Universe forever) hereby nominate you as an honorary member!

Congratulations, Dave — this is a high honor indeed bestowed upon only those worthy few who have done the most for promoting our cause.

To tell the truth, the Committee was on the downswing lately, as the character had been gaining more and more acceptance as a real character. The longer the She-Hulk is in the FF, the greater the danger is on her being totally accepted as real. And that is something which must never happen. Once you began printing my anti-She-Hulk letters, however, things really got moving again. Today, the Committee is more active than ever!

Actually, I don't have anything personal against She-Hulk. This thing has gotten bigger than both of us. I'm not protesting the character — I'm campaigning against the idea — the idea that rip-offs can be casually thrust upon the American public without resistance. I'm not doing this for me — I'm doing this for Marveldom, and indeed, all of America! We Americans must never let the likes of the She-Hulk prevail.

That's all I have to say. Thanks again, Dave.

Barry Dutter
Scotch Plains, NJ

P.S.—COMICS INTERVIEW is the best! (But then, that goes without saying.)

COMICS INTERVIEW ECLIPSES COMPETITION

Dear Dave,

COMICS INTERVIEW really is the best damn mag about comics currently published. It's the only one I can read through all the way to the end, too! Even when the interviews are with people I don't care for, you make it entertaining. My congratulations.

Dean Mullaney
Eclipse Comics
P.O. Box 199
Guerneville, CA 95446

SHOOTER INTERVIEW PATHETIC

Dear DAK,

Jim Sulicrup's SECRET WARS interview with **Jim Shooter** was *pathetic*. Talk about your conflict of interests! What next, "The Truth About Watergate: G. **Gordon Liddy** interviews **Richard Nixon**." Leave the unchallenged hype to MARVEL AGE.

Craig D.Smith
7031½ Norwalk Blvd. (A)
Whittier, CA 90606

MAKE MINE MARVEL!

Dear DAK,

It's been a long time since I've last written to any sort of comic-related book. I really don't know how to begin, so I guess I'll start with what "inspired" me to write in the first place. WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE KNOCKING MARVEL!?! I've been an avid reader of *all* comics for around 17 years now, and I've never enjoyed comics more in all my life. Seems like a lot of you younger "fans" (and I use the term loosely — there is a world of difference between a collector and a fan) don't know what the hell you're talking about.

I'm so tired of hearing how terrible the SECRET WARS are (what about DC's crap — SUPER POWERS?). Why are these people buying it. Chances are, because they know its value will be going up. No one is forcing you to buy it. Only a moron shells out 75 cents for something he hates. Oh, I'm sure Marvel is out to turn a quick buck — but who isn't (besides COMICS INTERVIEW and countless other independent comic companies)?

What I'm trying to say is that Marvel *is* fun. Throughout comic-book history — comics have meant fun. Take away the fun, and the magic is gone. You want stimulating literature, go read **Asimov**, puiz! (And fun I do mean — check out the toilet scene in SPIDER-MAN #260 — I giggled like a little kid!)

"Fans" talk about how good Marvel's competition's books are. For a buck-fifty to two dollars, they had damn well better be! I'll agree that a lot of the stuff is okay — but I've yet to read anything (except my favorite, LOVE & ROCKETS) that was truly original. The "crap" these other companies turn out by far outnumbers the quality work (which is done mainly by ex-Marvel/DC superstars).

"Fans" keep a comic going and "fans" can make it short-lived. Let the people who *do* the comics hear your grievances, *not me*. You have the power. If you don't like it, don't buy it! But let's stop knocking Marvel because of one tall person. Besides, chances are — one of the first comics you ever read was a Marvel book!

Make mine Marvel!

Mike Swinson
PSC Box 2324 .RAFB, TX 78150

DC IS BETTER THAN MARVEL

DAK and Company:

The Beast That Leaps, Sleeps and Peeps a/k/a The Sensational Snout Bitch?

Fluffy The Cat With No Sense of Smell?

Who ARE these people (if they are people at all)?

Anyway, about two weeks before I got COMICS INTERVIEW #15, I got a call from my very good friend **Amy Sacks**, who just wanted to let me know that you'd refrained from printing any more **Barry Dutter** letters in that issue. (**Barry**, now that you know that I'm a good friend of Amy's, you'll have to answer to *me* if you decide to ruin her day ever again. The girl is out for BLOOD, **Mr. Dutter.** And I've got the letters to prove it. Consider yourself warned.) Amy didn't disclose anything else on the interior, so I was left to my own devices this time out.

I have a major criticism of CI: I feel that too much time is devoted to Marvel and not enough to DC. So we get things like **George Olshevsky** and his complete Marvel/Timely collection, hot on the heels of the "hot" news about **Warren Reece**, who is simply a slavish Marvel devotee who doesn't give a flying flip about the more coherent (and slightly more continuous) heritage of DC. I think DC is putting out more better books than Marvel, and if I find myself putting down Marvels only to pick up DCs, in this year of the SECRET

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

Interviews are always the most interesting feature of any comics magazine — you probably flip to them first, yourself. Now! At last! A high-quality monthly magazine that interviews today's top talents, yesterday's legendary greats, and all the other people involved in every aspect of comics!

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BORES — or, WARS, it's no surprise, since Marvel is on a downslide anyway, as long as they keep putting out garbage like TRANSFORMERS and DAZZLER when they are capable of so much more. And Steve Gerber again. Groan. If the man has so much to say, give him his own magazine.

I really liked the **Colleen Doran** interview, although I haven't tried A DISTANT SOIL yet. All I knew about her was that she was very cute, until I read your interview. Now I find out that despite her stupid (sorry Colleen) idea to put **John Romita Jr.** on the Bullpen Bulletins Page a month or two ago, she's very bright and articulate, which to me are prerequisites for success in this field. And as for **Richard Pini**, he single-handedly proved you can find romance in the letters column, so more power to him. (I generally don't collect SILVER SURFER, but I picked up a copy of #5 just so I could read the letter from **Wendy Fletcher** that spurred Richard to write to her.)

But the fact you've put this whole She-Hulk "controversy" on hold really made this issue worthwhile. A few months back **Brian Talley** made the ultimate comment about the whole thing: "Who cares?" Until **Dutter** said those nasty things about **Amy Sacks**, I didn't care. As I said before he can "malign fictional characters" all he wants and it won't bother me a bit. Just don't make the mistake of dragging one of my best friends into your crosshairs, Barry. You may think this is a joke, but I for one am not amused. Watch out, kids, because I have a feeling all hell is going to break loose with the next issue.

Dave Mackey
180 Whalepond Road
Oakhurst, NJ 07755

CLICHED. BORING. BLAND. UNINSPIRED. INEFFECTIVE.

Dear DAK,

John Ostrander. Instead of fusing the private detective, sword-and-sorcery, science fiction and super-hero *genres* together, he has taken their worst cliches and hammered them into stories. Boring.

Timothy Truman. A nice illustrator, a bad comic-book artist. His layouts are bland, uninspired, and ineffective.

Val Mayerik. We haven't heard from him before, but then, he didn't have much to say. Or was it your questions?

Colleen Doran. Haven't read her stuff yet.

George Olshevsky. Finally! Someone different, entertaining, literate and comic oriented. Can we have more of this, please?

Only one? Oh well, better luck next time.

Kerry Lucarelli
P.O. Box 48
New Ipswich, NH 03071

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BlacJacMac, leader of the outlaw mercs and Grimjack's "best buddy." One of Tim Truman's "try out pieces" for First Comics.

INTERVIEW NICER PEOPLE

Dear David:

I have just finished COMICS INTERVIEW #15 and I must say that I was very pleased with the contents of the issue! This past summer I was lucky enough to be able to go to the ComiCon in Chicago. It was there that I got to meet a few of the people that were interviewed in this issue of COMICS INTERVIEW.

In Chicago I got to meet **John Ostrander, Tim Truman**, and **Colleen Doran.** Your interviews with these fine people brought out the fine personalities that they have. **John Ostrander** was a very likeable fellow and seemed to be as excited as the fans he was talking to. I could tell by talking to John that he really enjoys working with comic books. **Tim Truman** proved to be a very witty and good-natured person with a very nice family. It was also nice to find out that Tim is a fellow West Virginian.

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GIFFEN & GERBER

KEITH GIFFEN on the making of **The Omega Men** — STEVE GERBER speaks out on comics — **X-Men** inker TERRY AUSTIN talks — Marvel's top man, JIM GALTON, tells all — and much more in this premiere issue! Cover by GIFFEN & DECARLO.

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DON McGREGOR & CRAIG RUSSELL on **Killraven** — Origins of **New Teen Titans** told by MARV WOLFMAN — HOWARD CHAYKIN — French comics by NEAL ADAMS — lots more! Cover by RUSSELL.

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STARLIN speaks about **Warlock, Captain Marvel & Dreadstar** — GERBER, AUSTIN & OLIFF on **Deaths of Superheroes** — DC's DICK GIORDANO, part 1 From FOSTER to FRAZETTA — The last ROY G. KRENKEL interview — Cover by STARLIN.

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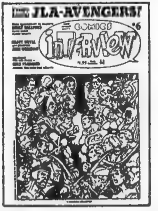
JLA-AVENGERS GEORGE PEREZ



GEORGE PEREZ & ROY THOMAS tell all— WENDY & RICHARD PINI, inside **Elfquest**, part 2 — BERKE BREATHED blabs about **Bloom County** — lots more! Awesome cover by PEREZ!

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Colleen Doran was a real pleasure! She is a very nice person as well as being very talented. If Colleen is an example of the type of newcomers that we have coming up in the business, then all I have to say is WONDERFUL! More of the "older" pros should be as nice.

I hope that COMICS INTERVIEW continues to interview more of the nicer people in the comics business.

I am still waiting for a **Don Heck** interview. Too many magazines have passed this talented guy up. I've talked to Don before and he is a very interesting man. I'm sure your readers would really enjoy an interview with this comics pioneer.

Stephen Scott Beau Smith
1 Fourth Street
Williamsburg Colony
Barboursville, WV 25504

Thanks for sharing all your observations on the personalities who appeared in issue #15, Scott — and I would indeed like to print an interview with Dashin' Don Heck. In fact, since you're actively engaged in producing the entertaining COMICAST (sort of a counterpart of COMICS INTERVIEW on tape, for those readers not in the know, and available from Sir Smith at the above address), how about volunteering your services, Scott?

— DAK

MORE PAGES!
MORE INTERVIEWS!
MORE COLLEEN!

DAK & Crew,

I'm sorry. Shoot me, but **Colleen Doran** is absolutely the cutest female comics-type person in the free world. Hang me for a chauvanist sexist aardvark, but I think that she's the best thing since creamy butter.

By the way, Colleen — whoever **Judson Scott** is, I look just like him and twice as entertaining, intelligent, and *never* wear house slippers!

Colleen — I'm yours!

Ken Meyer, Jr.
904 2nd Ave. Apt.D
Salt Lake City, UT 84102

P.S.—Thanks for the **Val Mayerik** interview.

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